

WEST DORSET NETWORK MEETING
Hosted by Weymouth and Portland U3A
on FRIDAY 25th OCTOBER 2019
at St Aldheim's Church Centre, Weymouth.

PRESENT: BLACKMORE VALE – Gill Westall, Susan Kidd
BLANDFORD – Sarah Houghton, June Lane
BRIDPORT – Valerie Gierth, Pat Grafton, Mick Holgate
CROSSWAYS & VILLAGES – Sheena Dearness, Carole Gadsden, Carol George, Mandy Blain
DORCHESTER – Ian Blaby, Jane Huff, Janet Kennewell
LYME REGIS – Ann Fleet, Rachael Pope, Penny Rose
SHAFTESBURY & GILLINGHAM – Rodger Laidler, Bill McIntyre, Bridgette Browne
SHERBORNE – Allan Lawton, Marion Pace
STURMINSTER NEWTON – Andrew Rowden
WEYMOUTH & PORTLAND – Steve Millin, Janet Armstrong, Nina Giles, Julie Paton, Chris Hill

APOLOGIES: Jill Nicholls (SW Regional Trustee) – report sent by email

WELCOME: Steve Millin, Chair of Weymouth and Portland U3A welcomed everyone saying that he was pleased to see that so many had been able to attend.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING held on Friday 15th March 2019 were found to have a name recorded incorrectly but otherwise were confirmed as a true record. The error will be corrected before signing. No matters were arising from these Minutes.

REPORTS

- **Jill Nicholls** (SW Regional Trustee) – report read by Steve Millin
Firstly, my apologies for not being with you, but I have a meeting in North Somerset.
Sadly, Ernie and Len Haysom from Bath and Wilts have retired due to ill health. Gordon Parry from Sarum has taken over this role.
Looe Valley Is in the process of closing but hopefully a new group will emerge soon.
We now have a regional support group consisting of half a dozen members from the regional reps who are prepared to offer their help to the RT in this enormous region. They will, I hope continue when I step down next August. HINT!
Some networks have well organised committees running business. It's not so throughout the region, where at the other extreme, getting groups of U3As to meet is all hard work, so it's good that your network continues to meet.
We have had several birthdays of 10 years or more and I've been invited to some cake cuttings and of course, eating! I've visited parts of the region I didn't know existed and found some delightful small roads thanks to my satnav.
New U3As – Tetbury is our late3st, Wilton and Chudleigh are also new, with Culm Valley and Teignmouth well underway. New propositions are Torpoint, Looe and Long Ashton. If you know of an area which would benefit from a U3A please, let me know.
I know there have been several open days because I've had to sign off their grants, but it's impossible to attend them all.
Theme Days – Jurassic coast was again a great success, led by Val Warren (Avalon). Art and Technology (North Devon) offered a wide variety of talks and workshops from willow sculpture to digital sewing.

National U3A Day – We hope that all U3As will join in the effort to promote our organisation with an event within their community. We encourage involving local dignitaries such as mayors, MPs, the media and others. Work with other charities who have similar objectives as ourselves. And make 3rd June 2020 a day to remember. There has been a suggestion of a flashmob! More information is on the website.

The next meeting of the regional reps is in November when we will have the opportunity to meet Joanne Smith, the new editor of TAM.

Ideas for conferences are always welcome.

That's all from me except to say thank you and keep up the good work.

Jill

- **BLACKMORE VALE**

As you know, this group only started in 2014 so we are still learning, having fun and gradually gaining new members.

In March with no speaker secretary the resourceful committee between them found speakers for this year. For next year the post has already been filled but there will be the inevitable change with other committee members that will happen in the new year. The committee has pulled together strongly despite family illness and many other commitments.

We were able to fund another summer party in June open to all our members at the local Golf Club. This time it was to celebrate our 5th birthday.

Our keen group leaders do an excellent job and at the open day in September their stands were very informative. This year we have added a music appreciation group to the list.

In an aim to ensure that we are all singing from the same spreadsheet the committee has agreed a new logo which in turn has meant document updating and website changes. This has been combined with an information pack for group leaders and advertising leaflets. It is hoped that this will be completely rolled out by the November meeting.

We look forward to seeing you all in Blackmore Vale in March next year.

Gill Westall and Susan Kidd

Co-Chairpersons

Blackmore Vale U3A

- **BLANDFORD & DISTRICT U3A**

Our membership stands at 359 and there are 43 groups. There are between 3 and 30 members in the groups.

John Rees ably took over as acting Chairman on the retirement of Christine Smith. Sarah Houghton has recently come onto the committee with a view to take over as Chair in March 2020. There is a very active and hardworking committee.

Monthly meetings attract, on average, numbers in the region of 100, representing just under a third of our members. Money is not collected at the door but a £1 charge is made for refreshments. Speakers are arranged by Bridget and she welcomes information regarding same and has asked that her details be included (bridgetspiers91@gmail.com)

Group leaders coffee mornings are held twice a year at the local golf club and are generally very successful.

The meeting is followed by a soup and sandwiches lunch, the catering being very good. The main issue raised by the committee at the latest meeting was membership cards as not all leaders are checking them. Groups are also encouraged to use the next of kin cards.

We have held two very successful 'You the jury' sessions and a third is in the pipeline.

Most of our groups meet in member's houses and everybody is asked to pay 50pence for the refreshments. Where venue hire is involved, the aim is for the group to be as self-financing as possible but support is given where there is a shortfall.

Meditation, a new group, is increasing after a rather shaky start. Pam Rees, group liaison, organised the group and let them decide who was to run it - fortunately somebody volunteered. Pam is also starting a new Gardening Group. This is separate from the Garden Visits Group and is more practical in format.

Our membership fees are £12 a year (£22 for two people at the same address) and £6 for half a year - that is from August until January - £11 for a couple. An oddity is that should a member from another branch join from August on they pay just £2.50 for the half year!

Our aim for next year is to increase membership through more open events and publicity.

- **BRIDPORT & DISTRICT**

We held our annual open afternoon on Sunday 16th October which saw 31 new members join the U3A bringing our total membership to 632. We currently have 68 interest groups; some new ones have begun while others have ended. A Geology group is due to start next week while a second Poetry group is also mooted and a Chess group will form if it can attract sufficient members.

The AGM was held at the end of April and was followed by an engrossing talk entitled 'Passport Stories from History'. These monthly talks continue to attract a good audience, usually filling the hall; September's talk on 'The 1951 Festival of Britain' proved both enlightening and nostalgic. Regular outings have been held throughout the year, a trip to Agatha Christie's former home at Greenway near Dartmouth proving particularly popular. Individual groups have also arranged trips and members of the 'Isn't That Interesting' group have gone indoor rock climbing and paddle boarding as well as visiting a variety of small local businesses to learn what they do.

Our Press and Publicity Officer, Maggie Haworth, has recently been publicising the U3A, courtesy of Keep 106, a Dorchester local radio station, with some of our members being interviewed. I hasten to add that this was with the full knowledge of Dorchester U3A! Hopefully this publicity will enable more people in Dorset to hear about the U3A and feel encouraged to find their nearest branch.

A Group Leaders meeting with a buffet lunch to follow is planned for early November, together with a new members coffee morning at the end of the month. Next year will mark our 10th anniversary, but we're not sure how to mark this auspicious occasion.

Sadly the bi-monthly Members Coffee Mornings have now ceased due to lack of support and the difficulty in getting helpers to run them. This is an on-going problem, next year at least three committee members, including the Chairman, will be standing down and replacements for them will need to be found.

- **CROSSWAYS AND VILLAGES**

The Crossways and Villages U3A started in June 2016. We have now been running successfully for three and a half years.

We are a small U3A charity in comparison to those in our neighbouring towns of Weymouth and Dorchester.

Our membership stays at a steady figure of around 60: we lose some and gain others. Many have been members from the beginning. June is our official end of year SO it is time for renewing subscriptions. The yearly subscription remains at £20 even though the cost of magazines has increased. We look forward to the day when we have a larger membership and can reduce our membership fee.

We welcome new members as it enables new interest groups to be set up so that we can offer more choice of activities. Our groups are small in number but are well attended.

We are a small friendly U3A and as 'the villages' U3A, we have members from Owermoigne, Winfrith, Wool, Broadmayne, Osmington, Warmwell, Preston and Morton. None, as yet, from West Stafford, the Brockhampton's, Puddletown, Tolpuddle, Poxwell or East Knighton, although we do actively promote in these areas.

Several are also members of Dorchester U3A as well as our U3A which opens up their choice of interest groups. We now have a 'Bus Pass' interest group who, to date, have travelled to many local destinations. We also have a monthly 'Curry Night' group which has proved to be popular and a recently started 'Family History' group which is run by a member and is an excellent opportunity for members to research their family ancestors.

Other groups include: Walking, Art Appreciation, Photography, Arts and Crafts, Poetry, Garden Appreciation, Card and Board Games, Trips and Outings, Singing for Fun and Cinema Outings. Although the principal of the U3A is that members instigate the starting of new groups, we do have a problem getting members to do so. This maybe because there is a hardcore who attend our public meetings, many of whom are already involved in running (or attending) groups, so have no wish to start taking on something new. Hopefully, as the membership grows, this will change. Groups can claim £20 per annum for purchases.

Our committee has grown in number to seven, The Chair is Sheena Dearness, Carol Gadsden is Vice Chair, Eve Sorenson is Secretary and Carol George is Treasurer. Pat Parnell and Mandy Blian share the role of Membership Secretary.

John McCarthy and Ian Scott ensure that Public Meetings are well publicised and smooth running. We charge £2 to cover the cost of the meeting; Speakers are booked until spring 2020. Our U3A is the first of its kind to appear the Country specifically for people living in villages but with the closure of shops and public houses publicity is difficult but this also means that it is important that our U3A can offer additional activities through our interest groups and to run some of these out in the villages. In Crossways, Magna Housing have kindly offered us the under-used lounge at Crossways Court which some groups are already using. We also utilise a private room in Broadmayne Village Hall at a reasonable cost.

We use a combination of A4 and A5 posters to advertise speakers and have recently acquired a large A-Frame board to promote the monthly meetings.

We occasionally liaise with neighbouring U3As such as Bridport and Blandford.

- **DORCHESTER and DISTRICT**

Our 25th Anniversary celebration went down very well with our members, we had an afternoon tea party in June at the Came Down Golf Club, a new venue for us. The food was very good and we were looked after very well. Coincidentally, two of our members were celebrating a milestone birthday and another two members were celebrating a milestone wedding anniversary on the same day.

We now have 847 members of which 19 are associate members and we have 60 groups. The membership has increased steadily throughout the year, we do little advertising so it is good to know that we are well known in the area.

We are continuing to grow our choices of groups with an addition of a third Reading for Pleasure Group, Solo Whist and Welsh Beginners to name but a few. We are lucky that members are coming forward to lead groups now and some groups have even managed to encourage someone to take over the leadership to give the existing leader a break. This is encouraging as we have struggled with getting new leaders for some time. We have some very popular groups now with 30 plus members attending regularly so we are always on the lookout for new venues; pubs are becoming popular, I wonder why! We are lucky to have a newish Community Church that can take an awful lot of people and do not charge, well that would be nice but there is a suggested donation so in theory we can pay what we like, it sometimes included coffee!!

Early in the year we had a pop-up session 'You the Jury'. Twelve members attended and were given two cases and had to decide what the outcome was, just like the real thing. It was organised by someone in the legal profession and it was very popular with those that went. So much so that we are having another one soon and still have a waiting list so there may be more. We have to be careful not to let too many people know or else we will have a readymade bank of jurors for the authorities.

Our Monthly Meeting Speakers have been very good this year thanks to Andy Davies who books them. We had a dual talk by legal People about wills and legal Power of Attorney which made us all think. Comparing an Indian Village with an English Village, a talk by Bonny Sartin an ex Yettie and a very funny talk by a retired vet about his life.

Like other U3As we have received information about U3A day 2020. We have a U3A Day every January when we have our own Open Day so are not likely to be doing anything in June.

- **LYME REGIS**

Val Doney resigned as Chair in November 2018. Rachael Pope took over on 8 March 2019. The monthly meetings and groups have continued as normal. Further to this there has been a focus on the following areas of work.

1) Updating the constitution

The committee decided that we should update to the U3A National 2018 model constitution. The existing constitution was dated 2006. Part 1 Section Object was actually approved at our AGM in 2018. Incorporated into this new constitution is the formal name change. Earlier this year the committee agreed to use the simpler name Lyme Regis U3A for all practical purposes.

2) Risk assessment

Several incidents have taken place in some of the U3A groups. Though nothing serious happened, there could have been a very different outcome. Actions were taken to ensure the safety of all concerned. These included discussions about risk assessment and setting guidelines for good practice. Group leaders agreed to share information about any incidents so that learning could take place.

First Aid: Maintenance of Life sessions were arranged, led by a paramedic. Five 4 hour sessions have been scheduled. The committee will be considering whether to arrange further sessions next year.

3) Review of publicity leaflets

It was decided to have a new A6 flier to advertise the U3A; a work in progress. A review of the A4 folded leaflet is also underway.

4) Website

A new website is going to be designed, probably using Weebly website builder.

5) Collaboration with other organisations

We have tried to build more links with other organisations e.g. Charmouth Village People. That is working well. We also exploring using Abbeyfield in Lyme as a venue for a group(s), which could involve the residents there.

6) Informal drop-in at the Pilot Boat Lyme Regis

For all members on the last Thursday in the month.

7) Latest ideas/work in progress

Possible project of teaching children to knit at the local primary school. A meeting of different generations to pass on skills. Our suggestion was greeted with much enthusiasm by the school. Further work is needed to bring this to fruition.

General business

Change of membership secretary and treasurer. We need to promote the U3A and encourage new, and hopefully some younger, members. Trying to emphasise there is no actual age limit to join the U3A, just the criteria of no longer being in full-time work. Lack of volunteers to be group leaders and to help on the committee.

- **SHAFTESBURY & GILLINGHAM**

In August we celebrated our 20th anniversary with a celebratory lunch at a local golf club. Guests of honour were the one surviving founder member Judy Wade and regional trustee Jill Nicholls. A special anniversary "In touch" magazine was produced with articles highlighting all the groups that have been running over the years.

Our membership remains around 350, at the moment. We continue to try to attract new members however at the moment new members are balanced out with those leaving. We have 35 groups who mostly meet in people's homes rather than paid venues.

Our annual membership fee remains at £10, with a £1 charge for our monthly meetings. Our financial position has improved dramatically from being virtually bankrupt in Aug 2017 to currently having a surplus of over £5,000. Hopefully our surplus should enable us to encourage more groups by offering start up grants etc.

We continue to find it difficult to get more people interested in starting new groups, the community radio group which was proposed didn't take off because of lack of interest. Day trips are very successful along with a well appreciated 5 day trip to Suffolk.

- **SHERBORNE**

We have just had our AGM and there has been a change to our committee. Marion Pace has assumed the role of Chairman and the previous Chairman, Allan Lawton, has taken on the role of Web Editor and Publicity. The Secretary and Treasurer have also changed.

Prior to the AGM we had a Special General Meeting (SGM) to change the quorum requirements in our Constitution. We have reduced the requirement from 20% of the membership to 5%, a more realistic figure. In the end we had around 10% of the membership at the AGM.

At the AGM we also introduced a clause which dictates how we handle the lack of a quorum – a feature which was lacking from our previous Constitution.

At the end of our membership year on 31st August, we had 844 members. Currently we have 775 paid-up members of which 67 are new members. We are also actively chasing up those members who are still attending groups but have so far failed to re-enrol.

We have 88 active groups run by 75 Group Leaders.

Ten new groups have been formed covering Play Reading, Sunday Lunch for Singles, Not Just Sunday Lunch, French Conversation, Beginners Bridge, Board Games, Insular Manuscripts, Medieval Images, Technology & Humanity and Canasta.

On the social front, a summer Showcase was held on Friday 5th July, and the Choir gave a well-received concert at the Sherborne Abbey Music Festival in May and a Sunday evening concert at Hazelbury Mill in August. We are planning a Festive Tea for Friday 6th December.

The Art Talks group visited Amsterdam in July, visiting many of the more famous Amsterdam museums and art collections. A trip to Madrid is currently being planned for next year.

2020 is the 20th anniversary of the formation of Sherborne U3A and We hope to mark the occasion in some way.

- **STURMINSTER NEWTON**

Our membership has recently increased (by 12) to 220. This was as a result of a very successful Open Morning held recently in the Atrium of Sturminster Newton Exchange, where there is a lot of footfall. We hold two Open Mornings a year – one in the spring and one in the autumn. They are heavily advertised, using posters, Facebook and local free publications. Our interest groups have remained steady – losing some and gaining new ones. We continue to be surprised by the fact that we still have attendees of groups who have not yet renewed their subscriptions – i.e. they are not members of the U3A! This seems to be a perennial problem. All our groups are self-financing. Our annual membership fee is £16 per person, with no reduction for couples at the moment. We also have a half-price rate from 1st September. We have an effective Committee of 8 members – this has been stable for several years now – we work well as a team. We have updated important policies and uploaded them to our website. We recently purchased 2 pull-up banners to be displayed at our Open Mornings, and a portable sound system for use at our bi-

monthly meetings. We are currently considering whether to sign up to Beacon – we will be meeting a Beacon representative soon for a demonstration of the system.

Our bi-monthly meetings continue to attract an average of about 50 members – not even 25% of the membership! We find this quite disappointing considering all the advertising we have done. We had a very enjoyable December bi-monthly meeting last year when we celebrated our 10th anniversary. We invited various groups to participate by giving a 10 minute performance of what they do. It proved so successful that we plan to do the same thing this December.

- **WEYMOUTH & PORTLAND**

Our current membership stands at 659, which is up on this time last year. As has become the norm this number will drop in the early part of next year as some members will simply not renew or will forget to renew, only to remember later. If past years are anything to go by, added to this will be new members. So far this year we have enrolled 132 new members. This is all by word of mouth, we do not advertise.

Having a large membership is of course all very well but it does bring with it some problems. We meet here in this room and the main hall next door. To comply with fire and safety regulations we can only accommodate in the order of 160 people and last meeting we had 150 members attend! If our numbers continue to rise, as the underlying trend seems to suggest, then we will be faced with some serious decisions to make.

Our membership fee stands at £12 per year, £7 after August. This is kept low as it benefits all members.

We meet monthly, excluding August and ask £1 entrance fee but supply free tea/coffee. (The entrance fee is under review.) Members are met as they arrive by “meeters and Greeters”, directing new would be members and visitors to the appropriate tables. These are volunteers from the membership, as are helpers in the kitchen.

Twice a year, July (under review) and December we have free open meetings where our groups “strut their stuff” for new and would be members.

It would seem that U3As are considered successful if their groups number ten percent of the membership. We have in the order of 53, but not only does this figure rise and fall it is also supplemented by various “pop-up” groups such as a Drumming Workshop, Jewellery making courses etc.

As with other U3A, members can meet in a variety of venues including member’s homes. It is however impractical for the larger groups to do this so a number of venues are kept on a database. This not only helps groups that grow, but also helps new groups get off the ground. Groups aspire to cover their own costs but are sometimes supported if this becomes difficult. This system works quite well, for us at least.

Once a year all our Group Leaders are invited to a lunch as a thank you for all their efforts and this also gives them an opportunity to find out what their colleagues are doing.

We send out two newsletters each year, in July and December to provide information for members. Also, after each committee meeting a “Committee Information Leaflet” is sent to members. Most of our members have e-mail addresses, which makes distribution much easier. With the newsletter and sometimes in between times we issue a “Group Information Leaflet” which contains all the information pertaining to all current groups.

Discussion

A lively discussion between delegates highlighted several issues:

1) The difficulty U3As experienced in getting members to renew membership promptly. Some suggestions were:

- Group leaders being given membership forms which could be completed and returned at the next meeting.
- Remind group leaders that non-members attending groups invalidate insurance and they should remind members to renew.
- Use Beacon for registers so that group leaders will be aware when membership lapses
- Some use Mail Chip instead of Beacon (this does conform with GDPR)
- Use of standing Orders (not direct Debit) but can create problems if fees change.
- Some make use of BACS but ask members using this to email the membership secretary and inform them of payment.
- Some send renewal form to members by post

2) Membership/Renewal Forms and GDPR:

- If GDPR is included on the membership form the Renewal form is not needed
- Forms need to be kept securely and destroyed at the end of the year.

3) Updating the Constitution

- It was felt that this could be difficult, some have used National recommendations but the language used was not popular.
- If the constitution is changed, an up dated copy must go to the National U3A and the Charity Commission must be up dated as well

4) Using Surplus Funds

- Offer free membership for a year if membership has lasted for a year or more.
- Pay 50% of hall hire charges.
- Reduce membership fees.
- 3 months free of group charges
- Need to remember that enough reserve is needed to cover 6 months of running costs
- When organising a Celebration, invite all members since many won't attend. There would be a need to consider fire regulations at the chosen venue.

5) Other Items

- Gift AID is a benefit of being a charity
- When a U3A has a problem getting a quorum for the AGM the 20% of members required can be negotiated down to 10% and possibly even 5%.
- Dorchester gains some funding from Riviera Travel if members use it to book holidays.
- Advertising is generally not encouraged although some U3As will do this for non-profit making, non political and non religious organisations
- Group leaders meeting are generally held twice a year, these can be Open Meetings or Group Fairs.
- Use of a Website is popular, 5 areas use the standard U3A website. Lyme Regis use 'What's on in Lyme' which costs £120 and some use WEEBLY, a website builder costing \$200 per annum.
- Most areas have a CLA license
- Magna Housing (care home) offer venues for groups free of charge if residents are allowed to join in. This works well if the space is available but arrangements can be cancelled at short notice at times. Some care homes request coffee mornings that work well.
- A group Photo was requested at the end of the meeting.

Contact List

The regional contact list was updated.

Network Coordinator Requirement

Marion Pace (Sherborne) kindly volunteered to take on this role.

Any Other Business

The U3A Day next June was discussed and it was agreed that most were doing this at different times in the year so it was unlikely that this would change.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be hosted by Blackmore Vale in March 2020 – Probably on a Thursday

Signed Date