

Report from the U3A Annual Conference & AGM 2018

29th -31st August 2018

Christine Ringrose and I, Gillie Clarke, registered for the Annual Meeting at the East Midlands Conference Centre in Nottingham.

This year we will be joined on the third day by our Vice Chairman Michael Wherton, who is coming specifically for the AGM.

4pm finds us in the Auditorium for the Welcome Address from the National Chairman Pam Jones. This year Pam will hand over the Chairman's baton to Ian McCannah who has served as Vice Chairman so knows the challenges and ropes.

Pam spoke of continuing success of the Third Age trust and has visited very many U3A's around the British Isles, Japan, Australia and elsewhere to spread the word. We are truly part of an International Movement.

Enquiring Minds

Enquiring Minds was the name of my first Workshop and was presented by the National Research Team. Jennifer Simpson stressed the value of U3A members playing an active role in Research within their own group or in conjunction with Universities, Local History Groups or Civic Bodies stressing that working with local Communities enhances the standing of the U3A.

The Natural World seems to be an area that is most commonly involved in these studies. Groups have looked at local parks, rivers and the local countryside and have aided research into declining species eg. bees, glow worms etc. The Wales Coastal Project has had a great input from a local U3A interest group.

Lea Valley, Woking, Salford and Bexley are involved in Reminiscence where they talk to people within the local communities and care homes to record their memories of life in the locality or eg. WW2 while there are still people who experienced it.

The subjects covered in research by U3A Groups over the UK are too many to list here, so if you have an idea, go for it, the benefits are very rewarding.

The final word from the research Team was how important it was to share your findings by presenting your data to the local community and within the wider U3A; they would love to hear from you.

[<http://u3aresearch.org.uk>]

iDEA [Inspiring Digital Enterprise Award]

This Workshop was an introduction to a scheme, iDEA, set up by Prince Andrew, Duke of York, in collaboration with a team from Buckingham Palace led by Carezza Jennings who was our presenter. The original aim was to give young people the chance to gain recognisable qualifications that would enhance their employability, a scheme open to all.

The plan is based on a series of user friendly, easy to understand Computer Programmes on various subjects; built around Badges, [Bronze, Silver and Gold], which give a Record of Achievement. There are currently 73 subjects on line.

The scheme is now recognised as a valuable tool for on line learning for all ages and U3A members are invited to go on line at iDEA.org.uk to see how they can indulge their interest or gain a badge just for the hell of it.

Christine's workshops included the following:

U3A Groupings and Network Link

The UK U3A Movement is divided into nine English Regions and three Countries {Wales, Ireland and Scotland}, each of which has an elected Director who is part of Governance at National level. Regions are determined geographically and can be quite large. Networks were created to facilitate the exchange of information and developments closer to where they are based.

Network Link was set up two years ago following a survey of members; it is a 'bottom up' development, not 'top down'; true to our ethos. It is estimated that two thirds of all U3A's are members of a Network; they have a certain amount of autonomy based on what makes sense to them not on the region where they arise. Features include:

- Opportunities to meet key members of neighbouring U3A's, share experiences and discuss new ideas
- Develop solutions to common problems
- Participate in Trust Funded, or self- funded, Inter-Network based events, ie. meetings, workshops, competitions such as quiz nights
- Develop and share 'Speaker' lists

National is very supportive of Networks and recognises the importance of the part they play within the Movement. As the number of U3A's increase, their role in maintaining the unity and ethos of the Movement becomes even more important.

U3A Plus

U3A Plus, with Hilary Jones as Chairman, was formed in April 2017; its aim is to provide advice and support to all U3A's to enable them to achieve full inclusivity for all of their members. The Committee comprises two wheelchair users, two blind members and two members with hearing loss, reliant on sign language.

Hilary asked if we were aware of the disabilities our members have; be it vision or hearing impairment, mobility problems or dementia, and how we can help them to participate in our U3A activities and meetings.

Discussion amongst the group highlighted steps taken to assist members with disability issues:

- Reserved seating at the front for those with sight loss
- Reserved seating at the front and the end of rows for those with mobility problems
- Provide written material using clear print, adapting membership forms and newsletters etc. for members with special needs
- Provide a hearing loop

Despite the U3A being a volunteer, member organisation, we are still viewed as a 'Service Provider' in terms of being required to make **reasonable** adaptations to allow inclusion. It is important to remember that we are an Educational Institution not a Welfare Institution, but we must also encourage members to talk about their needs. A website is available for advice and support: **plus.u3a.org.uk**

Volunteers and Volunteering

This workshop was led by Sophie Wellings and Kelvin Rushworth and the objectives were to identify what motivates people to volunteer; some were identified as:

- Make a difference
- Contribute to community
- Use existing skills /learn new skills
- Somebody 'asked me'

At National, Regional and Local Level the U3A exists because of Volunteers; only at National level are there any paid employees. We are not alone in this; School Governors, Special Constables and Magistrates only function due to Volunteers.

Research has shown that the highest rates of volunteering are among the 65-74 year olds with 32% volunteering once per month and 42% once per year. Also that:

- 1 in 5 people aged 50-64 are caring for a relative
- 80% of grandparents provide some form of child care
- Decline of around 5% in rates of volunteering amongst over 55 year olds

Each delegate stated that they faced challenges in recruiting volunteers especially for executive or leading roles. Some of the barriers encountered were:

- Lack of confidence in running a Group or joining a Committee
- Too much responsibility for too little respect
- Trustee role viewed with suspicion
- I'm retired!!
- U3A is for fun

Sometimes we all need reminding that the U3A is founded on the Principles of Self-help and Mutual Aid and wouldn't function without volunteers at all levels.

We should ask, not what you can do for me but what I can do for you.

Moving Well + Eating Well = Ageing Well

This was the beginning the final day and Professor Janice L. Thompson from the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences made this presentation both informative and thought provoking.

Topics under discussion:-

- How active should we be to support healthy ageing
- What is a healthy diet? What types of food should we eat to support healthy ageing
- Assessing what you eat – using the Diabetes and Diet Questionnaire to score the health of your diet.

Professor Thompson stressed that every day activities, just moving around, limiting the amount time spent sitting down was key to achieving a basic level of activity; she was not advocating punishing workouts at the gym.

Eating a wide variety of foods including fresh, tinned and frozen vegetables and fruit were essential elements of a balanced diet as were carbohydrates and proteins. Fad diets and cutting out any group of foods was strongly discouraged. Older people tend to absorb less vitamin D through the skin and also tend to have less bone density. It has been shown that eating oily fish is a good source of this vitamin or, for vegetarians, walnuts, flaxseeds, linseed oil, chia seeds, cooked soy beans and tofu. A supplement of 10mcg[400IU] daily was also advised.

Overall the message was: **Walk more, sit less and exercise.** Eat a mixed diet with the emphasis on veg and fruit.

AGM

At the AGM the Chairman, Pam Jones, talked about the many developments and growth of the organisation during her term of office, the need to promote the U3A into the wider community and the importance of the media in this digital age. She also spoke about the success of the Third Age Trust as a charity when many other charities were failing.

The Financial report was given by John Ellison, National Treasurer, who was also standing down after many years of service. The Finances, he was happy to report, were very healthy.

Other business on the agenda covered the appointment of the Auditors for the Third Age Trust and the appointment of the new Chairman and other Officers.

- Ian McAnnah is now the National Chairman
- Hilary Jones is the National Vice Chairman
- Richard Teare is the new National Treasurer
- Jean Hogg is now Regional Trustee for the East Midlands

The AGM ended at 12.30pm and the Conference closed at 3.30pm.