



## **CHAIR'S NETWORK EVENT 2025 REPORT ( MGN)**

This includes a summary from the u3a event where the organisation discussed its goals and strategies to increase membership and enhance engagement. Discussions involved challenges such as the need to attract younger members and the importance of promoting u3a's benefits to prospective and current members alike.

- Introduction by Liz Day, who has led the event for 4 years now passing over the event to new team leaders Jenny Wilson and Val Girling.
- Speech by the CEO, Iain Cassidy, focussing on the vision of the u3a.

### **Part 1- Where are we now? Where are we going and Why?- Jenny Wilson**

- It's about promoting the u3a better and with practical hands-on exercises.
- A challenge to increase u3a membership from current 400,000 to 500,000 by 2028 was discussed. Disadvantages of becoming too large an organisation was also considered,
- Participants brainstormed why people join the u3a, highlighting factors like social interaction, learning opportunities, and informal education.
- Concerns were raised about attracting younger members and the benefits of increasing membership for national influence and organisational growth.
- Strategic aims of the u3a were discussed: promoting a collective identity, maximising member benefits, advancing exciting learning experiences and collaborating with like-minded organisations.
- Issues of differing local organisations' appearances were considered regarding u3a's collective identity.
- The conversation included perspectives on retiring to new opportunities rather than simply leaving from a previous job.
- Very entertaining role play with Jenny demonstrating how to /how not to promote the u3a at local level. The word 'university' should not be used in conversations when talking about the u3a, as it puts prospective members off!
- Membership of the u3a brings people alive, with new interests and trying things they couldn't do years before. Many of our members join for the social element and this is good for meeting people and good for your mental and health well-being. It keeps people connected.
- We provide non formal learning in the u3a.
- Jenny mentioned two groups of overseas visitors to Croydon u3a- 2 students from Utrecht university in the Netherlands as part of their thesis about how social connections impacted the life of a person. Another delegation from Taiwan also attended many of Croydon's u3a activities and couldn't believe that the u3a is made up of volunteers, working for free, with no syllabus.
- Jenny ended with " Make u3a exciting"!

### **Part 2-Practical help on growing your membership – Val Girling**

- The membership of Palmers Green and Southgate has increased by 70% since she took over as Chair, post-COVID. This has been possible through a managed, pro-active approach.
- **What are the pre-requisites of how to successfully increase your membership?**

Answers from the attendees ranged from- having an efficient and effective committee; a decent website; an informative newsletter and a wide range of activities.

- Every u3a has different challenges but an effective Membership Secretary and Groups Co-ordinator are especially important.
- The use of Beacon/ or similar data base to keep track of members, size of interest groups, contact lists is essential in the organisation of a successful u3a. It is invaluable for the Groups Co-ordinator and others to be aware of the needs of groups.
- It is time and labour saving to be able to easily send emails to members.
- It is essential that there are enough spaces available in interest groups to meet the need of the inflow of new people.
- If an interest group does become full, starting up a taster group is a good idea and members can take it in turns to organise the content each time they meet. Convenor-ship therefore becomes less onerous. This new group will then grow if there is enough interest and it will run itself after say 4-6 meetings. These can lead to the growth of another new group.
- Making new members welcome is vital to encourage them to join. A new members' event – such as a 'Welcome Tea' and a 'Welcome Pack' are important for new members.
- Having a Meet and greet team at monthly meetings and a New Members area is also welcoming.
- Outreach can be useful by linking up with other groups like historical society, art gallery or specific local resources/facilities.

### **Part 3-Health Check of your local u3a- JW, VG and IC circulated the questionnaire**

Questionnaire requires honest answers about your u3a and if there are 4 x No answers, this indicates the development areas for your u3a.

Plan and a time line for 6 months/one year/three years.

### **Part 4- Workshop by JW and VG- Promoting Your u3a**

- Tables were laid with informational leaflets and ideas for afternoon activities related to promotional and organisational strategies.
- Participants received tips for designing effective flyers, with emphasis on short, impactful promotional quotes, supplied by Rod Fox.
- Quotes used for promotional material reflect diversity and inclusion.
- Equity over equality, is seen as a better maxim, highlighting fairness in adapting support to individuals' circumstances.
- There was discussion about the various promotional materials and strategies used to recruit new members for the u3a. These include bookmarks, car stickers and brochures, all designed to spread awareness and attract interest in the organisation's offerings. Members were provided with resources and examples to inspire promotional efforts, especially in creating inclusive and equitable environments.
- Key promotional messaging includes phrases such as "today, tomorrow, together" and "live a life less ordinary".
- Recommendations include avoiding outdated information on materials and highlighting membership benefits rather than specific fees.
- Suggestions made for improving leaflets include incorporating pictures and avoiding details which quickly become outdated.
- The discussion followed on the efficacy of using physical flyers and leaflets as tools for recruiting new members, contrasting it with the potential of digital media.
- Many suggested improvements and discussed the potential role of social media and digital campaigns.

- There is a call for more adaptable and locally tailored leaflets rather than a single, one-size-fits-all national leaflet.
- Suggestions were made to use digital tools like social media for wider and more effective outreach.
- The importance of consistent branding and messaging is emphasized to raise the organisation's profile.
- The potential for using video content as a recruitment tool was discussed.
- There is a call for training and resources to help local groups with digital marketing and leaflet design.
- Concerns were raised about the ability to measure the success of these physical and digital campaigns.
- There was a discussion about how the national body can better support local organisations in their recruitment efforts.
- There was an opportunity for participants to jot down ideas and feedback for the council and board, Chris Bulford and Jenny Wilson.
- There was no rush to submit ideas today, allowing flexibility to discuss within committees first.
- Ideas can be submitted by tearing off a part of the provided paper form and keeping the contacts for future email updates.

#### **PRESENTATION-Looking Forwards, promoting the organisation locally, regionally and nationally – Iain Cassidy, CEO**

Iain is representing the national body. He had worked in the voluntary charity sector for 20 years. He asked questions about the national marketing campaigns and particularly the national u3a flyer; what is the purpose of such a flyer/ who is it designed for?

Many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the existing national leaflet and flyers saying they were outdated, not reflective of members nor the organisation's mission and did not effectively attract new members. Many thought it was uninspiring.

Majority of u3a's use a leaflet in recruitment. It was agreed that the leaflet must be bullet points, short, sharp messages and be relevant to local issues.

Promoting u3a's – there are grants available from the u3a. There is money available for advertising spends at the local level, like local paper adverts as well as online adverts u3a's can receive funding for such adverts.

It is obvious that the Croydon u3a leaflets actually tell you what Croydon u3a is all about.

Request for group activities and pictures of events to be sent to Head Office. Important to capture our events. There is good use of videos for promotion by Ravenshead u3a. Any media can be used- TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, rather than leaflets. Good idea to add music to the videos.

It is important that later life is considered a positive experience. Policies need to be there to support us in later life. That is why it is essential for the u3a to grow in size, to include the population who are in the 3rd life stage. We need to be implementing future changes.

All council /board members have been contacted and allowed time to consider their roles. There is huge change – new CEO, new Chair, change can be difficult, but there is lots of time to develop.

There is a need for the TAT to provide excellent service to local u3a's. It is agreed that the national response is not good enough. It is vital that TAT helps local u3a's to recruit and to instil 'mutuality'.

It is vital to remove challenges when setting up a new u3a.

#### **How do we ensure members are part of the movement? How do we stay relevant?**

**Why do some u3a's flourish and others don't? Are we thinking of future members? What about in 10, 20 or 30 years time?** Iain confirmed that he didn't have the answers..... but discussion is needed.

If a Generation X fills out a form on a website or online, we need to be ready.

95% of u3a's have voluntary led committees who make things happen.

Iain explained that TAT has staff, and the governance body, with the board of Trustees to ensure the charity meets the charity aims. They delegate to Iain. There is only one annual return service to Head office from all the u3a's. This was not felt to be sufficient.

There are many new member events , which can be booked online and then be identified and tracked when booking other events.

The u3a membership brought the request to reach 500,000 members by 2028 to the AGM.

90% of those who join the u3a do so for the activities. Response from only 10% of the 400,000 members.

The u3a voice can be frustrating, as there is not a two-way communication platform.

The u3a can provide negotiated offers, with its good purchasing power, extra discounts if sign up to 'Friends u3a', 1500 signed up. So there is demand. This must be more heavily promoted by the national administration.

The crisis of the ageing population means that if an organisation can talk to government, there could be a huge range of benefits to be accessed. This would ease the services and reduce loneliness, isolation, health inequality. It is a challenge , but would the government listen?

Val has been involved in investigating the social prescribing route. She has been involved in setting up, attending meetings through the NHS, medical boards, health federations, health boards and so on.

There is a whole cohort of people who need to know what the u3a has to offer .

If we become part of the policy making, we can help towards reducing deprivation, social isolation and health inequality. This group is not represented in the u3a population.

**Chris Bulford- , Islington, Shared Learning Project.**

Based in SE London, there is the Lewisham Historical Society, there are 200 years of documents which need digitalisation. If anyone is interested in helping this project , please leave your details with the Chair.

**Jane Fisher – Merton, - EDI**

Volunteer for the Trust, presenter for EDI. There have been no requests for her from the whole London region. She prefers face-to-face presentation, rather than online. There is an EDI committee on the National website.

**Vivek Nanda- Islington**

Consider a variety of different ways of attracting members by using bite size groups, You Tube and podcasts. Referred to excerpts of 1984, Brave New World novels being narrated live by Simon Callow online. Worth checking these out as a new way to attract members.

At Regional level- there is Events Page- on London website. Register via Eventbrite to get the link.

Members were encouraged to take back ideas from today to their local u3a committee and members.