

U3A Contributors and Consumers

Pnawn Da

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to your meeting. I hope to be able to have the opportunity to meet you all in the future.

I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to be involved in the U3A movement. The movement of 384,000 people offers so many opportunities to “live learn and laugh.” The energy and enthusiasm I have seen is a testament to all of you who make such a difference to communities in all of the areas you live in around the country. It is truly both amazing and humbling.

I have worked in the charity sector since 1995. I spent many years working with older people who were devastated by loneliness and depression, and many years working to make a difference to people’s lives by campaigning for change for those most vulnerable in our society.

The U3A is without doubt a huge contributor to the wellbeing of third agers in communities across the country. It is an organisation that is built on respect for each other and the opportunities to learn together, form each other and to value the company of each other. Many more U3As are needed.

My immediate aim is to review where the movement is right now and then plan for the future with the movement. It is important for me to have the opportunity to speak with as many people at the grass roots of the movement involved in it every day to ensure I get this right.

The Guiding Principles

The Third Age Principle

The Self-help Learning Principle

The Mutual Aid Principle

The U3A movement is unique, and is flourishing as a movement...why is this the case given the difficulties faced by so many charities today?

Many charities face uncertainty in terms of finances, whilst at the same time demand for their services is rising. The Charities Aid Foundation has found in one in five charities are struggling to survive¹ Findings

- Generating income and achieving financial sustainability is the most pressing challenge for charity CEOs
- Demand for services has increased for four out of five organisations in the last year, and this is only expected to get worse. A further 85 per cent expect demand for services to increase in the next 12 months but worryingly just one in seven CEOs feel completely confident that they will be able to manage the increase
- Meeting demand for services is a challenge which has risen significantly since 2015, and is now the second most common challenge for organisations.

¹ <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2017-publications/social-landscape-2017>

- New technologies and more diverse ways of giving are being used to overcome challenges and reach goals
- Negative media stories are seen to have had a damaging impact on the sector, and many feel that government support is lacking
- Three quarters feel that the public do not understand the importance of charities to Britain today.²

The founders of this movement looked ahead when they founded the U3A, and established the guiding principles. It is the guiding principles that has kept the movement resilient in times of acute financial pressures for both the voluntary and public sectors.

So lets look at the Principles and see how they have contributed to our resilience.

I. The Third Age Principle

The movement is open to anyone that has retired, wherever they are. It has no other criteria, and is simple and straightforward.

It also says that the movement should be open to everyone...whatever the geography. “Members should do all they can to ensure that people wanting to join a U3A can do so.”

^{2 2} <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2017-publications/social-landscape-2017>

And...members should be convinced of the value to life of membership and lifelong learning.

So...

Our strength is having a simple criteria...anyone can join.

But how is that applied in practice?

Some U3As spread the word with zeal, they constantly strive to include new people in their communities, they open new U3As when their U3A becomes too big. This is what the founders envisaged.

But some...want to keep the U3A as a club, they restrict post codes, or even sometimes impose criteria on membership...or work against new U3As opening.

The U3A movement has an enormous effect on people's lives...it could be the NHS's magic bullet.

I wanted to take a moment to reflect on what the movement achieves for society in general across the United Kingdom and the enormous contribution it makes to quality of life.

Loneliness

Which – A recent report cited that

Half of all people aged 75 and over live alone, and one in 10 people aged 65 or over say they are always, or often, feel lonely – that's just over a million people. ³

³ <http://www.which.co.uk/elderly-care/your-relatives-needs/tackling-loneliness/386429-causes-of-loneliness-in-older-people>

CAUSES of loneliness include Bereavement, retirement, lack of contact friends and companions through leaving employment, moving or illness for example.⁴

According to the Campaign to End Loneliness, organisations concerned with older people regard loneliness as a health problem as well as a social one. A lack of social connections is “a risk factor for early death”, which can be compared to smoking 15 cigarettes a day and is worse for the elderly than obesity and physical inactivity⁵

Turning to depression, the Royal Society of Psychiatrists report that 1 in 5 older people living in our communities suffer from depression, causes can include painful events such as the loss of a loved one, changing circumstances or dealing with difficult situations.⁶

Physical illness increases the risk of depression and untreated depression is the leading cause of suicide among older people, with men living alone at particularly high risk.⁷

As well as the emotional impact on retired people from Loneliness and Depression there is an impact on NHS resources in supporting people managing depression.

So what helps.....

⁴ <http://www.which.co.uk/elderly-care/your-relatives-needs/tackling-loneliness/386429-causes-of-loneliness-in-older-people>

⁵ <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/about-loneliness/>

⁶ <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/depressionkeyfacts.aspx>

⁷ <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/depressionkeyfacts.aspx>

The Royal Society of General Practitioners advice it includes

“Interventions to increase social participation, physical activity, continued learning and volunteering,”⁸

This is a good description of the U3A movement.

The Mental Health Foundation says that “Friendship is a crucial element in protecting our mental health. We need to talk to our friends and we want to listen when our friends want to talk to us. Our friends can keep us grounded and can help us get things in perspective. It is worth putting effort into maintaining our friendships and making new friends. Friends form one of the foundations of our ability to cope with the problems that life throws at us”.⁹

So Friendship is very important....where can we find new friends, and new communities of common interest?

In 2008 there was a Campaign aiming to save the cuts in adult education, many organisations took part including the U3A.

At the time many retired people said adult education was somewhere they could go along on their own and meet people – adult education has but gone –

but the U3A continues to provide that opportunity to learn and forge long lasting friendships – the strap line LEARN LAUGH LIVE + is evident in groups up and down the country.

⁸ www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/clinical-resources/~/_media... · PDF file

⁹ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/f/friendship-and-mental-health>

We know that members say that the U3A does impact on their lives, it offers friendship, it offers support, it offers community.

So we need to work hard to keep our doors open to everyone. Everyone could benefit from membership

Turning to the second principle The Self-help Learning Principle

This is the great leveller in the organisation...everyone is equal. Teachers and learners are equally respected, if you have a skill share it, and learning is for learning's sake. It is the joy of learning that is behind the movement. No qualifications are sought or given. Anyone can teach and learn, and together people learn in groups.

The model itself apart from being enjoyable, gives the movement resilience too...it is low cost, and has enormous impact.

People learn languages together from scratch, they use DVDs, they use MOOCs they share knowledge and experiences.

We have subject advisers who offer guidance and support.

Our model...participative learning is unique.

The final principle is mutual aid, The Mutual Aid Principle

a) Each U3A is a mutual aid organisation, operationally independent but a member of The Third Age Trust,

which requires adherence to the guiding principles of the U3A Movement.

b) No payments are made to members for services rendered to any U3A.

c) Each U3A is self-funded with membership subscriptions and costs kept as low as possible.

d) Outside financial assistance should only be sought if it does not imperil the integrity of the U3A movement.

This again adds to the resilience of the movement. It is low cost, people meet in each other's houses, subscriptions are kept low, there are no payments for services.

It is based on co-operative principles, of people working together for the greater good.

If you look on the co-ops in the Uk website it says

*Cooperation is defined as working together towards the same end, and joining forces to accomplish a task that one can't achieve alone. Simply put, co-ops provide the framework that allows people to get what they want in a way that better meets their economic, social and cultural needs.*¹⁰

So...the U3A is a true co-operative it is by the members, for the members...

The U3A is a co-operative, people give and they take in the movement. Its strength is from its great ethos of

¹⁰ <http://strongertogether.coop/food-coops/what-is-a-co-op/>

volunteering. It is to the huge impact of volunteering that I want to turn to that next.

So what difference does volunteering make to us?

The happy effect

- A study by the London School of Economics on volunteers in the USA found the more people volunteered, the happier they were. Compared with people who never volunteered, the odds of being “very happy” rose 7% among those who volunteer monthly
12% for people who volunteer every two to four weeks.
Among weekly volunteers, 16% felt very happy¹¹

Why?

Volunteering connects you to other people

Volunteering allows you to connect to those you are volunteering with- in this case our community is the U3A

Even helping out with the smallest tasks can make a real difference, you could be a meeter or greeter of a Chairman, each task undertaken makes a difference

And volunteering is a two-way street, it make a person feel included, part of the U3A community add to their confidence, it can help them learn new skills, it can help them make friends with people they may not have otherwise have come into contact with.

¹¹ <https://www.coursehero.com/file/p3lpc68/When-researchers-at-the-London-School-of-Economics-examined-the-relationship/>

Volunteering is good for your health

I would like to read you some extracts from “A Guide to Volunteering and its Surprising Benefits”.

Volunteering provides many benefits to both mental and physical health.

Those of you prone to feeling irritated ...Volunteering helps counteract the effects of stress, anger, and anxiety. The social contact aspect of helping and working with others can have a profound effect on your overall psychological well-being. Nothing relieves stress better than a meaningful connection to another person. ¹²

Those of you who may feel down from time to time...Volunteering combats depression. Volunteering keeps you in regular contact with others and helps you develop a solid support system, which in turn protects you against depression. ¹³

Volunteering makes you happy. By measuring hormones and brain activity, researchers have discovered that being helpful to others delivers immense pleasure. Human beings are hard-wired to give to others. The more we give, the happier we feel. ¹⁴

Volunteering increases self-confidence. You are doing good for others and the community, which provides a natural sense of accomplishment. Your role as a volunteer can also give you a sense of pride and identity. And the better you

¹² <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>

¹³ <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>

¹⁴ <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>

feel about yourself, the more likely you are to have a positive view of your life and future goals.¹⁵

Volunteering provides a sense of purpose. Older adults, especially those who have retired or lost a spouse, can find new meaning and direction in their lives by helping others. Whatever your age or life situation, volunteering can help take your mind off your own worries, keep you mentally stimulated, and add more zest to your life.¹⁶

Volunteering helps you stay physically healthy. Studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not. Older volunteers tend to walk more, find it easier to cope with everyday tasks, are less likely to develop high blood pressure, and have better thinking skills. Volunteering can also lessen symptoms of chronic pain and reduce the risk of heart disease.¹⁷

What is the economic difference that Volunteering makes?

In 2013 a piece of statistical research was undertaken by the Greater London Authority. They found older volunteers in London **alone** contributed significantly to the London economy by volunteering:-

- £4.7 billion, as a result of caring for other adults
- and £600 million providing childcare for their grandchildren.

¹⁵ <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>

¹⁶ <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>

¹⁷ <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>

- Older Londoners contribute a further £800 million through volunteering activities.¹⁸

Volunteering in our U3A

There are many roles to take....but each volunteer makes a difference.

Why do people volunteer....and others not.

Why do some turn away?

Making volunteering easy

Some people are shy, they don't want to push themselves forward, even although they may want to help.

Volunteering appeals often don't work, as still people have to come forward.

Volunteer coffee mornings.

We have new member coffee mornings...why not volunteering coffee mornings.

Come along and see if you could help? Meet new friends, have a coffee with us.

All hands welcome.

There are many roles, putting out leaflets, pouring tea and coffee, to being group leaders and sitting on committees. They all need to be filled.

Recognising Volunteering Contribution

¹⁸ GLA Economics report – **The Economic Contribution of Older Londoners**

The wonderful hard working committees often rightly get recognised. But what about the people that always pour tea and coffee at the monthly meeting. Perhaps once a year e.g. at the AGM you could read a list out of everyone who has lent a hand, or perhaps include it in your papers

Volunteer Recruiter at each monthly meeting

To all those that still do not volunteer, we need to ask why not you too?

It is not a closed club, committees need refreshing, newsletters need writing, web pages need updating.

There are also a whole lot of other areas waiting to be developed. For example **Regional Volunteers**

Through feedback to national office we have found that operationally there are three areas of need for volunteers

Three main tasks:-

- Setting up new U3As
- Running Workshops
- Troubleshooting

Each require different skill sets.

We are working with regional trustees, and meeting trustees and volunteers and potential volunteers around the country to agree our plans.

The requirement for local training, a national meeting for volunteers and a workshop for volunteers at the conference were made clear.

We have had meetings in the regions all are clear- they are happy to be trained in grouping of regions close to where they are.

We want to develop forums for all volunteer types, whoever they are, and the opportunity for people who share the same roles to come together, get updates and share experiences, for example Treasurers forums or Group Co-ordinator forums.

6. Equality and Diversity

Planning on equality and diversity outreach is beginning to take place.

This covers areas such as ensuring membership reflects our communities, and making our services accessible for people with disabilities.

From an education perspective we are looking at areas such as online platforms that could allow people to take part in U3A activities who can no longer attend. But such platforms need to be user friendly.

7. Technology

The Trust is looking at how Technology can work for us.

Some U3As have suggested streaming main events. We are looking at whether we can stream the AGM to local U3As for example.

As well as the moodle platforms above, we are also looking at whether we can provide discussion platforms for people interested in discussion and debate on particular subjects. In a call to action from Pam Jones our Chairman in the last TAM 53 people came forward to help on thinking about learning for the future. Both on line platforms, technology and learning, and new subject areas.

One volunteer is collecting information about the more rare subjects people run, to share expertise in these areas, e.g. Russian and Japanese.

8. Policies and Procedures.

Of less interest but nonetheless important are areas such as data protection – where the law is changing – we are ensuring each U3A has access to a model updated data protection policy and briefing paper.

Safeguarding – a model policy has been produced

Copyright – this guidance with the help of U3A Dorridge has been updated and checked by a solicitor

9. The Office

In the next five years, either imminently or in five years time the office will aim to find a location closer to a mainline station so that members visiting London can come and see us.

In addition we have promised to get on the road more and bring training, events, advice forums closer to you.

However we cannot do any of this without you... we all need to work together to keep the current U3As strong, and to develop the new U3As of tomorrow.

We need everyone's skills...everyone has something to share.

....And finally with you we will be putting together a strategy for all of us...towards Eric Midwinters challenge of the next 1000 U3As

