

Hello from the Chair — July 2021

Hello to all our u3a 'family'. I hope you are enjoying the warmer summer weather. I don't know if you agree, but I especially love the weeks around the summer equinox when dawn starts so early and the evenings are so light. There is something magical and Midsummer Night's Dream-like in the air. So, while still being extra Covid careful, I hope you are enjoying the warmth, the great outdoors and the blossom whether you have a sumptuous garden or a small window box.

Your Management Committee have been extra busy as we work to facilitate the re-starting of groups in both a safe and financially sustainable way. This has presented a number of challenges. We now have the extra support of two new members of the Management Team – Jim Sinclair, our new Groups Co-ordinator, and Bryan Neaves, our new Health and Safety Officer. We thank them both for stepping up to help in these testing times. Jim, supported by our Vice-Chair, Linda, is meeting with Group Organisers to help map out their plans for the future. Meanwhile, Bryan has been working on risk assessment and health and safety guidelines for groups as they re-start. Nearly 20 of our groups, many of them the sports/outdoor groups, have re-started which is great news and we hope to support more activity over the coming months. I know that many of us are longing to meet up again with the friends we have made in our various u3a groups and enjoy our shared interests once again.

The Management Committee continue to grapple with some difficult financial matters, especially around the issue of high and rising venue costs. To facilitate groups re-opening, we have agreed to try to cover these costs from reserves until September when there will be a clearer picture of the way ahead. Hopefully, this will give those groups in high-cost venues a breathing space to try to find cheaper alternative venues. After much detailed analysis, a decision will be made very soon about the subscription model which we will adopt to stabilise our financial situation. Once this is decided and shared with members, we will begin to process membership subscriptions between July and September for the 2021-22 year. We hope you will all join us in working together towards a stronger and financially stable Swindon u3a in 2021-22. Being clear about the numbers of you re-joining will also help us in assessing our financial position in September. The Publicity Team, led by Chris Ockwell, will be working throughout the summer to remind everyone of the great benefits

of joining u3a – and to hopefully attract some new members. Come and visit our stall at the Wroughton Carnival on 3rd July. Meanwhile, the Office is preparing to re-open. safety screens are being installed and computer systems fired up and, hopefully, working properly. We may need to ask you to be a little patient over the processing of membership fees while we get organised during the summer.

The Management Committee are planning an Away Day on the 12th June. Amazingly, it will be the first time that many of us have actually met in real life (albeit socially distanced!). Of the 11 of us, 6 are relatively new to the team and have only interacted via email and zoom. We are looking forward to checking out that we really exist in the flesh and blood! More importantly, we will be laying the groundwork for our Strategic Plan which will guide us through the next two to three years.

At present we hold onto our hope that the coming weeks will see some sort of gradual return to what used to be ‘normal life’. It may be that some things will never be the same again, holidays, going to the office, travel, public entertainment, but I remain optimistic that our u3a will recover, groups will restart, people will once again enjoy each other’s company and the activities they love. Yes, I am optimistic and I hope you are too.

Warm regards to you all.

Gill

chair@swindonu3a.org.uk