

This newsletter is being sent from the East Midlands Regional Support team, in the hope that Networks will enjoy hearing about what happens elsewhere and that ideas can be shared. I hope that you find it interesting. There are seven Networks in the East Midlands, of very differing sizes. This first newsletter explains a little about how they all function. The photos are from an event held in Nottinghamshire last summer.

Derbyshire

There are 17 u3as in the Derbyshire Network, and there is considerable variation in size. They are notably geographically dispersed around the edge of the Peak District, so meeting up physically is challenging. Historically, we've been a fairly 'loose' Network, meeting twice a year, recently once face-to-face and once digitally. At our most recent, face-to-face meeting 2 key members of the Facilitating Team of 3 were due to step down, and there was a question about the future of the Network. The meeting very clearly decided to continue because of the value of getting together and sharing experiences. 2 new members stepped forward to join secretary Irene Wilkinson (secretary of Chesterfield) on the Facilitating Team, Barbara Aslin (now ex Chair of Belper) and Sheila Crawley, Vice Chair of Ashbourne. *Sheila Crawley*



Leicestershire

Leicestershire has had a Network since 2009, but, having subsequently moved to a more formal model, it folded two years ago, when there were no volunteers to take on the various roles. However, recently the Network has relaunched in an informal manner, with u3as taking it in turn to organise meetings. The first meeting was held on 16th February and 24 people had planned to attend representing 14 u3as. In the end, a number of people had to send apologies so that attendance was lower. However, Dave Palmer, a member of Syston u3a, who organised the meeting, said that it went well and that there was a very helpful discussion about 'Recruiting and

retaining Group and event organisers'. A further meeting has already been planned by Great Glen, Oadby and Wigston in June.

East Lincolnshire u3a Neighbourhood Network.

East Lincolnshire u3a Neighbourhood Network (ELNN) comprises Boston, Horncastle, Louth, Skegness, Spilsby, West Wolds and Woodhall Spa. The individual u3as are generally too dispersed for joint member-level events, but representatives meet three times a year to discuss matters of mutual interest. At every meeting member u3as report on their membership numbers and recruitment, finances and developments such as websites and the courses they offer. Some groups are seeing continued significant improvement, while others are stable but showing slower development. Generally, u3as in higher-population areas are doing better than those in lower-population areas – but none are struggling. Almost all have recovered from COVID, and some have significantly improved their membership, finances and the number of their activities.

Recent topics for discussion at quarterly meetings include the variable charity status of individual u3as and their relationship to the TAT charity, travel and subsistence allowances, managing persistently disruptive members, and setting up arrangements for Gift Aid.

The new TAT structure has had little effect on us, though John Lewis often attends our meetings to let us know what is happening at the higher levels of the organisation. We have not been able to find a volunteer from our Neighbourhood Network to serve as the second East Midlands Region representative on the National Council alongside John, but we were happy to endorse John's candidature.

Generally, members of the ELNN are happy with how things are going and are actively working to improve recruitment, finances, the range of courses offered, and communication and publicity. The problems we discuss tend to be minor and remediable – the group acting more as a skills-sharing and advice group than a forum. *Peter Stephenson Skegness u3a*

Lincoln Neighbourhood group

This group covers the area around Lincoln and has nine member u3as: Lincoln, Bailgate, Branston, Cliff Villages, Gainsborough, Heath, Lindsey, Saxilby, Wellingore, Witham.

A recent decision has been to move from meeting every three months to six months. The next meeting will be in April.

Some of the above u3a's may have some specific interest groups that may be of interest to any fully paid up member of another u3a. Wherever the relevant group convenor agrees that there are spaces available on their group, reciprocal arrangements may be able to be negotiated.

A very useful list of all the interest groups in the member u3as has been compiled.

South Lincolnshire Neighbourhood Group (SLNG)

The South Lincolnshire Network Group is a loosely formatted group that includes Bourne, Deepings, Grantham, Sleaford, Stamford, Sutton Bridge u3as. We do not have a Chairman and we do not minute the meetings although we do have notes prepared just so that non-attendees can read what we spoke about. We limit the agenda to two or three practical items facing our u3as and try to avoid just being a talking shop. It is also attended by u3a Regional Representatives, which at our last meeting on 24 February was John Lewis. We meet every 6 months.

Topics discussed were:

- How to run a successful Membership Recruitment day.

- Other successful ways of recruiting members.
- Recruiting members into Interest Groups.
- With regard to Regional/National we asked that new policies and working practices be proportionate to the organisation. It is difficult enough to get Committee Members and Interest Group Leaders as it is without adding to the responsibilities. So if it's a legal requirement, do it. If it's doing it just because someone else is doing it, like EDI, let's not do it. The Women's Institute lost numerous affiliates by having initiatives which failed to align with members, we do not want u3a to do the same. *Roland Higgins, Stamford u3a*

Northamptonshire

- Currently we have 12 u3as in our Network. One disappeared off the radar until very recently but will hopefully send representatives to our next meeting in March.
- We aim to meet three times a year – March, June and October. Annie Curtis, Trust Volunteer, chairs the meetings and I act as Secretary.
- The format so far has been to begin with business, such as recent reports from TAT or EMRST, before dividing into two groups to share ideas – literally to network!
- We have a Chairs' forum every time so that Chairs can talk about issues such as general recruitment, recruitment to Committee and covering roles on the Committee – at least one of our Committees copes with just four members!
- At last June's meeting, Programme Secretaries discussed who they would recommend as Speakers. They also set up a WhatsApp group. In October, it was the turn of Publicity reps to meet and a variety of suggestions were made about how to advertise our u3as to the wider public. Again, a WhatsApp group was set up. In March, the Membership Secretaries will have their turn.
- We always ask each u3a to send in short, positive reports on events or new initiatives since the last meeting, which are circulated with the Minutes. These have included increased membership, 10th anniversary celebrations (Daventry and District), successful outings and new groups. *Gill Potts County Contact*

Nottinghamshire Network of u3as

There are 34 u3as in our Network covering all of the u3as in the county.

We have a Constitution and are affiliated to the Third Age Trust. We also have a bank account and u3as pay £15 per year which allows us to pay for a meeting venue and have some funds left over for incidental expenses.

We have a Committee with the following roles:

Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Contact Officer, Web Site Manager, Support Officer, Peer Support Group Coordinator, two other Officers.

We hold meetings 4 times a year one of which includes the AGM. Meetings always have an element of information such as a speaker or consultation where we ask members' views.

There are a number of special features of our Network:

Our Contact Officer manages our Beacon site. This allows us to easily contact each u3a within the Network to pass on messages. This facility is used extensively and is of great benefit.

Peer Support Groups are set up for each of the key Committee roles. Each group is run differently according to the wishes of the members but most take place using Zoom. Some have WhatsApp groups. The purpose is for members to be able to communicate and gain support from fellow members in the county who hold the same role.

As an example: the Chair's PSG hold meetings every 3 months or so on zoom. The agenda is made up of items sent in by members of the group. We have had discussions on topics of particular concern such as copyright, insurance and safety, and recruitment.

Special events: we try to put on at least one event a year for u3a members across the Network. Examples are:

u3a 40th Anniversary Flash mob and beacon transfer around the county.

Conferences: Healthy ageing and Enjoying life with key note speaker and break out sessions.

Online u3a national workshops on Keeping it Legal, Running your u3a, Managing Complaints and Disciplinary Processes. Face to face workshop "Interest Groups Matter".



Finally, our Network supports the liaison with the wider region and members are involved with setting up and taking part in the new East Midlands Support Team.

Also, separately organised is the North Notts Neighbourhood group of u3as, that has reciprocal arrangements in place for Interest groups.

Rosie Allen Support Officer

If you wish to contact any of the Networks for further information, please email me and I will pass it on. Jean.hogg@u3a.org.uk