

Chair's Report for 2022 – 2023

Palmers Green & Southgate u3a Charity no: 1165425

Presented to 9th AGM on 27th September 2023

All u3as offer people no longer in full-time employment an opportunity for lifelong learning, friendship and fun. In Palmers Green and Southgate u3a our aim is to encourage and enable members to share their knowledge, skills, interests and experiences by meeting in focus groups, at monthly meetings and to enjoy themselves at regular social events.

Government changes have meant that charities now have to pay bank charges, which is why we urge all of you to embrace 21st century technology and manage your membership renewal and other payments to us electronically where possible. This has made financial transactions so much swifter and easier for many groups and helped our treasurer a great deal. We now have a card reader which is available at Monthly Meetings and on other occasions to make paying even more convenient.

In January 2023, we successfully implemented the u3a Beacon membership system, which provides an option to join or renew online using a credit card. This has resulted in an increase in Gift Aided membership fees. The system includes the option for group conveners to manage their own groups and training is being provided. Other useful features include the facility to email all or selected members. Individual members can also set up an account to view and amend their personal records.

The website is about to be migrated to a new platform called Siteworks, which is supported by the u3a. We will be one of the first to be moved to the new site.

Current Membership as at 11th September 2023 stands at 438 and increasing weekly. We are very proud that so many of you stayed loyal over the last few years and almost a hundred new members have joined us since last year. They have been able to learn about all the wonderful groups and events we have to offer by attending the Welcome Tea parties which have taken place every three months or so.

The new style of interest group introduced last year, called BiteSize, continues to prove popular. Interest groups are offered in a four session cluster, which is reviewed at the end of the four sessions. Most of them continue beyond this and become regular groups advertised on the website. These have proved very successful and will continue to be offered as an alternative and to supplement the usual sort of activity. Mah Jong is one example where three BiteSize rounds of teaching beginners has now resulted in a fully fledged group being launched in July.

As a result of the effort to raise the quality of our speakers, the monthly meetings have seen an increasing number of members attending. We hit triple figures at our meeting in July, as Art Group 4 staged an Art Exhibition and raised around £700 for the Alzheimer's Society. We continue to search out speakers who hopefully appeal to you all, whatever your interests, and aim to continue to do so in the coming year.

Communication with members continues to be via monthly bulletins; contributions to the bulletin come mostly from the executive committee and convenors. This is a vital way to communicate with our members and you are encouraged to open all the links and read to the end, to make sure you don't miss all our exciting opportunities! We have tried to ensure that members without email are kept up to date by group convenors and by a text version of the Bulletin which goes out by post.

We have produced our new look magazine, in hard copy and online, for two years and have prided ourselves on the range of articles written and the high quality of artwork and photographs submitted. Today we say goodbye to one of our Editors, Robin Charnley, who is leaving the Committee this year, and we wish him well as he pursues his travels. In light of this, we will be reviewing the magazine's formula and are looking for a member with the relevant experience and technical skills to join Jennie as co-editor.

Social events, where members are encouraged to bring along non-members, were introduced for the first time in March 2022 and have become a regular feature on the calendar. The Outreach Team (created to increase membership) has successfully run a Barn Dance; a Bollywood Evening and is planning a Quiz Evening on October 7th. These events have all been a sell-out and have successfully increased our membership. Please continue to support us; come along and tell your friends.

A strength of our u3a has been its outings and trips. These are all going ahead as usual now, thanks to the dedication of the small band who research, plan, organise and lead these trips and holidays. Both the holiday trips to Norfolk and Wales have, as ever, been successful and enjoyed by all who went. In addition there have been several other Freedom Pass outings which have proved very popular.

Finally, as chair of the Executive, I would like to extend a warm thank you to the executive committee and the Outreach Team for their stalwart work this year. I would also like to thank the group convenors for their continued hard work. I am holding a Tea Party for Convenors on Friday to thank them officially.

And last, but not least, I would like to thank all of you for remaining part of our u3a. Let us hope that 2024 will be a happy and hopeful year, filled with new interests, new people and plenty of laughter.

Val Girling, Chair