

Verwood U3A AGM Tuesday 10 November 2015 – Chair's Report

Welcome to Verwood U3A Members, existing and new, and to our special guests Cllr Mrs Sandra Grove, Verwood Town Mayor and her escort Lyn, who we thank for accepting our invitation to attend.

The main theme of last year has been growth. We have significantly more members. This time last year we had 170. At the end of last year (April 2014) we had 184. We now have 224, which represents a 32% increase since the last AGM. We also have more Groups and more activities. We welcome growth not for its own sake but to increase opportunities and choice for members and to share the benefits of U3A membership as widely as possible. The reasons behind our growth include the quality of Groups, hard work by our many volunteers, and a "critical mass" factor as a rising membership and increased activities increase word of mouth recommendation and create a "virtuous circle" of growth.

However growth brings challenges which we need to manage. These include increased enrolments to process for Membership Secretary Brian Hawkins, a bigger email database to maintain, extra banking for Treasurer Jean Baverstock especially from trips, booking venues is made more complicated for Crissy Harris and more website material for Webmaster Tony Bird such as publicising trips.

There are also challenges for Group Leaders. Growth has produced a welcome boost in numbers for some, but we have to avoid Groups becoming too big. Group Leaders have responded in various innovative ways. One was to create extension Groups, for example Cardmaking with Dee Brooks and new Leader Carole Cocker, and Art with Crissy Harris joined by new Leader Chris Ollerenshaw. Also a brand new Drawing and Sketching Group is to be launched by Cathy Knight to help meet the growing demand for art. Some Groups have been split, for example Alex Forbes now has a split session with Spanish Beginners and Spanish Continuation Groups. Also alongside the Computer and Technology Group Tony Bird runs a Beginners Group when demand arises.

Growth creates a need for new Groups but also brings in new members willing to start them. Table Tennis under Alan Birchall rapidly established itself in January. We currently have several new Groups which will begin next January, namely Digital Photography under Peter Kingsbury, Keep Fit with Tai Chi under Maggie Elliott, and the already mentioned Drawing and Sketching under Cathy Knight. All have healthy numbers of prospective members.

In other Group news, Music has paused, and we thank John Page, and Recorders ended; we thank Mark Kenny. The Reading Group was covered during Sue Savage's absence and we say a big thank you to Julie Allen and Stephie Cox for stepping in. We are delighted that Sue has now returned.

We have two special Groups which were created at the last AGM. The Film Group has been working with The Hub to improve publicity for its film presentations and we thank Angela Daymond and Tony Bird for presenting our views and persevering. Several meetings did result in progress including Tony publicising films on our website plus links to trailers. Currently Hub staffing and other issues have put things on hold but we remain committed and hopeful.

The Travel Group has made a major impact with a series of excellent trips since the spring. Their teamwork and efficiency has been outstanding and we thank Jean Dyer, Sylvia Page,

Chris Ollerenshaw, Sue Wallis, Joyce Timpson and David and Gillian Orchard.

The Social Meetings sub-committee, Pam Jury, Jean Baverstock and Crissy Harris, have continued to organise and run Monthly Social Meetings. We have discussed ways of increasing attendance including investing more in Guest Speakers. Future bookings include an expert on the Bermuda Triangle and the former Curator of Clouds Hill and expert on Lawrence of Arabia.

The Website continues to be central to our communication, publicity and recruitment, and has become the first port of call for most new members. It is updated speedily and efficiently. New items include Useful Links and Travel Section which both publicises and presents photographs and reviews of trips. We sincerely thank Tony Bird for his hard and thoroughly professional work.

Our Monthly Lunches have continued to be well supported and an excellent Christmas Lunch was organised at Crane Valley Golf Club. We thank Jeanette Warburton for her hard work and efficiency. Members are encouraged to see Jeanette after this meeting to book for this year's on 9 December.

Other successful events were a successful Group Leaders Lunch in June to thank Group Leaders and an Open Day in the Memorial Hall on 26 August where there was a huge turnout of volunteers and we welcomed many new members. I thank all who braved the weather to attend. Similarly our stall at the Rustic Fayre on 31 August did a lot of new business and special thanks go to Pam Jury and Barbara Winter for running the stall and to others who visited and helped (this year in the marquee; we needn't have worried, the rain went away this year!)

A successful Watercolour Exhibition was held at the Hub during September and October. Thanks to Crissy and Norah for organising this and to the talented Watercolourists. We gave away a lot of flyers at this event which clearly did much to raise our profile in the community.

Finally thanks to you our members for making the past year such a successful one and for your friendliness and enthusiasm which make Verwood such a vibrant and enjoyable U3A.

David Cheshire,
10 November 2015