

Bakewell Chairman's Report 2023/24

"In so many ways the U3A has been a lifeline to me."

I have just found the above in my inbox. Such feedback is very rewarding and reflects well on the many individuals who continue to serve Bakewell u3a.

Since becoming Chair nine months ago one or two important changes have been made. Perhaps the main one is that we have adopted "Beacon" to manage membership data. Although data processes and security are much improved we remain to upgrade the quality of the data. Over time we will achieve this by checking the data held by Group Leaders against that currently stored in Beacon. Luckily, Kath Hopkins, who has recently joined us as Membership Secretary, has previous experience of working with Beacon when helping to manage Brecon u3a.

Membership took a dip during the Covid Period and, although currently holding its own, we need to recover to something around pre-pandemic levels. A reasonable target is to recruit fifty members in the next two years over and above natural wastage. Word-of-mouth remains very important as a marketing ploy. Everyone can help in by simply talking about our u3a. Just 6% of the post 65 year old age group in our area are members. To put this another way 94% of people of the u3a age group are not members and many of those have not even heard about us. You - our existing members - are our best ambassadors. I encourage you to tell positive stories about Bakewell u3a to anyone prepared to listen.

You can inform people that we have many small groups operating with little fanfare. However, simply because they are small does not mean they are inconsequential. If the u3a principle of self-managed learning is being followed then small is often beautiful for topics like languages, philosophy, art, poetry, craft, photography and creative writing all of which operate successfully and play an important part in the life of their members and, collectively, in the life of Bakewell u3a. If these groups are "full", and some are, this does not mean that a "no entry" sign should be hung on their door. With enough enthusiasm and commitment another group can always be started. A good example is our various walking groups. We have so many it is tricky to keep track of them all. Sam Lewis mailed me today to say that thirty members are heading off in a couple of weeks time to enjoy a walking holiday in Shropshire. Surely a positive sign of commitment and members enjoying themselves.

But we do need to create new groups to increase membership. With this in mind we are surveying all members to find which groups to launch over the

coming months. The result of this will give us a good indication of where to focus our efforts. Additionally there will be an Open Day on May 21 at the Medway Centre to show-case the activities of existing groups and attract potential new members. This will be a significant event for Bakewell u3a and require much support. I hope you will find a way in which to become involved.

Finally I must record my thanks to all committee members, to those who lead groups. to the Meg Laird group who provide and support our social programme and to everyone else who has helped us in any way: without you there would be no u3a. I was elected to become chair when I knew very few of you and very little about how Bakewell u3a operated. To those who have supported me and taught me in the generous spirit of the u3a - thank you very much. You have been my Bakewell u3a "lifeline".

Peter Holt
March 2024