

Annual Report from the Chair.

Southwell U3A

Peter James

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Southwell U3A is now just over eight years old. During these first eight years it has grown to be a successful and vibrant organization. The last year has been characterized by a period of steady growth and consolidation.

The groups are central to the life of any U3A and here in Southwell we are fortunate to have a very large number of people who are willing to be group leaders and organisers. At the latest count we had 74 groups meeting regularly. However this compares with 78 that were meeting just over a year ago.

With a growing membership we need to encourage and support new group leaders so that new members can access a wide range of learning and social activities. During the last year several groups have ceased to run or are suspended. While there was a net decrease in the number of groups on offer several new groups have emerged. These include WW1, Gentle Exercise, Play Reading and another Canasta group.

During the past year our social committee has organised and run many coach trips to varied and interesting places. This is an onerous task and we thank them for their dedication and hard work. It has been a feature of the past year that several groups have organised and run coach trips for their members. There has often been an invitation to other members, not in the group, to join them. While this has enhanced the variety and interest of visits, it has meant that at certain times of the year there have been more outings than people wanting to go on them.. All in all the past year has provided an extensive programme of visits.

The main monthly meetings during the past year have seen a variety of entertainment and more academic speakers. I often receive comments, both good and bad, about the choice of topics but variety being the spice of life it is difficult to please all of the members all of the time. The meetings are well attended, numbers varying between approximately 250 and 300. An army of volunteers make these meetings possible, some starting as early as 8.00 am. The PA system was upgraded by the purchase of new equipment and although there has been some problems, the new four speaker system does certainly seem to enhance presentation. The old system, that had certainly seen better days, was offered to several of our groups. These offers were all declined so rather than scrap it your committee authorized it to be donated to another local U3A.

During the last year (June 2013 to June 2014) the membership has grown; 87 new members, while 37 left. This net increase of 50 represents a growth of approximately 8%.

This increase in membership has implications for us all. Your committee held a number of extra meetings during the past year to consider the options available to our U3A and the implications of any decisions.

Considering the size of membership there are three basic options.

1. Let the membership grow
2. Set a limit to the membership
3. Look for a way to split the membership into two smaller U3As

In coming to a conclusion, the committee examined the implications of each of the three options. After many hours of discussion, we all agreed that the membership should be allowed to grow. There were many reasons for this but central to the argument was that the other options raised more issues than the chosen route. Obviously this decision is not set in tablets of stone and a future committee may decide to alter this position.

There are many issues arising from our continued growth and success; during extra committee meetings a number of these were discussed. Central to these discussions are methods of communication with members and administration of membership.

Turning first to communication, we agreed that for the present we would continue with the personally addressed copy of Newslines. We decided on a new look to the publication which is in bigger print, with more photographs and a double page calendar. This has now been introduced.

Our second string of communication, important to members as well as the outside world, is our web site. This was in need of serious reconstruction and a programme was put in place to enhance and update the information that is available there. A small group of volunteers have agreed to undertake this work. This programme is ongoing but I hope to be able to announce in the coming months that the web site is now up-to-date.

Administration of membership was a more thorny problem. We examined various options including moving to a system of all members renewing on the same month each year. After several hours of debate we decided to stay with our present situation of a rolling renewal programme and keep this issue under review. What did become apparent during this time was that the membership team were having a lot of problems with their outdated computer software and hardware. They have an onerous task of producing renewal slips, new membership cards, reminders to renew as well as keeping the membership database up-to-date. After several long discussions it was decided that to secure the data held and to enable our dedicated team to work more efficiently that the committee would furnish them with new and up-to-date hardware and software. I am able to report that the new hardware and software has been purchased. The membership team and others have spent several afternoons with a software expert so that when the new membership team is in place the process will be completed. This

should enable them to work more efficiently as well as offering better security for membership data.

Over the past year a great deal has been achieved. Your committee has worked extremely hard in securing the future as well as providing day to day support for all aspects of our organization. The social committee and some group leaders have offered no less than 12 trips over the last year. At least 74 groups have met regularly providing ongoing education and recreation for all. A large team of volunteers have provided a successful and sometimes entertaining meeting in the Leisure Centre each month. There have been joint learning projects with both The Minster School and Brackenhurst College. To all of the people who helped to make these events happen – about 15% of the membership – we say a very big thank you.

I ask you to adopt this report as the annual report for Southwell U3A.