



*November 2009*

## **VU3A SUPPORT GROUP**

All U3A groups are dependent on volunteers to fill every position and vU3A has been fortunate in having volunteers who have worked together in the steering committee since 2006, indeed the guinea pigs, otherwise known as the Windmillers, with Paul, Mike and Elaine, have been contributing to vU3A since 2004. New members have joined and have offered the same dedication.

The size of the main committee is limited and at the last committee meeting it was agreed that we form "vU3A Support Group" in which we can harness the skills of our members in a variety of ways, providing an environment where future committee members can be nurtured, handle projects as leaders, assist leaders by acting as a shadow, assist with publicity to gain new members, to provide a pool of experience members able to give support to other members in their specialised field, acting as "buddies" to members who are having difficulty in acquiring experience in the most basic communicating problems.

Having proposed that we have a vU3A Support Group we are now asking for you to volunteer to join that group in whatever capacity that you can. Remember the old adage "many hands make light work" being a guiding principle. It is proposed that we have a page on the wiki in which members can list the areas in which they can help others. Their name, Skype name, and e-mail address would appear but not their telephone number as we consider that the telephone in many cases will be too big an intrusion into the personal life.

The committee very much hope that you will volunteer and that you will send to JohnMW, alternatively approach any committee member, the information in the last sentence and the areas in which you can help, by e-mail please to [wariner@waitrose.com](mailto:wariner@waitrose.com)

## **CREATIVE WRITING**

To those who have not yet visited the creative writing group, or those who have not made a recent visit, we thoroughly recommend time being spent in becoming acquainted with our writers. There you will find the latest entry from Sheelagh with the fascinating story of voluntary work at Whippsnade Zoo under the heading of, 'My Job'. It would be great to have more descriptions of peoples' voluntary work. Many are of the opinion is that the country would collapse without volunteer workers.

## ***A NEW YEAR RESOLUTION***

To run most groups and to have lectures we need more active members. Will you make New Year resolution to recruit a new member by the end of January 2010 - two or more new members would be great.

## ***LYNDA'S ACCOUNT OF HER INVOLVEMENT FROM 2004 TO 2009***

When I saw on the U3A website that they were looking for participants for a pilot scheme to try to duplicate the advantages of a U3A group online, I didn't hesitate to apply. I live in a rural area, can't see to drive after dusk and the possibilities for socializing are virtually impossible. I enjoy my own company but I value learning, good conversation and social contact too and this, it seemed, was what the new project would provide - by computer.

We were a diverse group from many countries but we had much in common, not least the enjoyment of being pioneers in an exciting venture. Facilitated by Elaine and Michael Williams of the UK, the group was given its first task - complete a project about Windmills. We could choose any aspect of this and the diversity was amazing: wind turbines, windmills in art, the windmills of Spain and much more. The presentation too was exciting; from the simple illustrated guide, to websites with animation but it was the bond we formed whilst working on this which made a lasting impression. We e-mailed and chatted, those with webcams were able to see one another. We learned about each other's families, past histories, achievements and ambitions - yes, people over 60, 70 and 80 still have ambitions! Then the unthinkable happened and Elaine Williams, a bright, lively lady who had always been so encouraging, a sensible, supportive voice to us all, passed away very suddenly. For a while we didn't think we could continue but then realised that for her sake we simply had to. But the long, drawn out process which followed threatened everything. A few hardy volunteers had to tackle not only an immensely complicated platform which didn't seem to respond for many users and had endless technical hitches, but also the in's and out's of funding, permissions and so on.

Two years came and went and it looked as if the VU3A was moribund and destined to stay that way. Through it all though, the Windmillers, as we had named ourselves, stayed in touch. There was little we could do but wait until the boffins got it up and running - reliably. It is a testament to our closeness that we DID keep in touch, felt ourselves to be real friends, and desperately wanted the idea to succeed, not just for ourselves but for all those older persons across the world for which social contact outside the home is limited.

Then John Wariner found a simpler platform which could build to specifications - instead of trying to fit in with a difficult system as the poor volunteers in the UK were doing. He put together an entirely independent structure and asked us to test it. We did and it worked. He then offered this as an alternative to what was

being worked on and eventually, after much thought, discussion and trial, it was accepted. The Virtual University of the Third Age was finally online.

From Lynda Finn (Founder Member)



**To Conclude this Newsletter  
we wish you  
A Merry Christmas  
and  
A Happy and Healthy New Year.**

Joint Editors: John Wariner & Kate Western