

U3A Yarra City President's Report 2022

2022 has been another successful year for our U3A. One where, despite not having had access to our main venue, the Community Room at Collingwood Library because of building upgrades, we have still managed to have a full program. I don't want to tempt fate, but it finally appears that we have emerged from the lockdowns of the COVID years and members have returned to face to face classes and the opportunities for social connections and learning that are so important to all of us. A positive from the COVID lockdowns however has been better understanding of the possibilities for remote and hybrid presentations. We even look like getting our Community Room back!

Our membership numbers have returned to close to the levels of the previous year, after a drop at the beginning of the year. As of August, we had 360 members (with 309 full members), which compares favourably with the same time a year ago, when we had 367 members (with 316 being full members). These 2022 numbers are also higher than for pre-COVID 2019. One aspect of our membership figures that the Committee has noted is that a greater proportion of our members are older than 70 years compared to previous years. Exploring ways to attract new members, some of whom, over time, take up the opportunity to offer classes and activities, is an ongoing issue for all U3As and something we will be turning our heads to more, as we hopefully put the COVID years behind us.

Once again, I want to thank all our tutors who have continued to put in many hours of their time to offer engaging classes and activities – and numbers of tutors who are now offering two classes in order to accommodate new students. I also want to thank our office volunteers. They are small in number, and while there are quiet times, and more so now that more of us have transitioned to using emails and the internet, their efforts are extremely valuable to those members – or prospective members – who seek their assistance. I also acknowledge the efforts of our Newsletter team (Tina Hocking, Susannah Dax and Lyn Morgan). We are fortunate to have such energetic, creative members who selflessly donate their time to produce such engaging, enjoyable newsletters.

We at U3A Yarra City continue to enjoy a positive partnership with Yarra City Council, and we are extremely grateful for the ongoing support of Council officers at Yarra Libraries, Yarra Venues, the Neighbourhood Houses and the Council's Aged and Disability Services team. In particular, I want to acknowledge the support from Lauren Brooker, the Council's Coordinator for Positive Ageing. Earlier in the year our Ageing Well group, led by Helen Nankervis, worked closely with Lauren on the forum that the group organised, *Connecting Community Groups for Active and Healthy Ageing*. The forum itself was a wonderful success. It was held at Collingwood Town Hall, 72 people attended, including Council officers and representatives of other community groups, as well as U3A members. Fiona Patten MLA and Councillor Amanda Stone also attended. Speakers, panel members and facilitators included a number of our U3A members: Nina Hansen, who gave the opening address; panel member Jonno Morris; and Susannah Dax, who facilitated the table group discussions after lunch. Of course, such events are the result of many hours of planning and organisation. Congratulations to all who were involved, and thanks to Council who supported the event with a community grant.

Another highlight has been that Lyn Watson was recognised for her contributions in the City of Yarra Community for 2021, in the Community Spirit category. The award, which was announced in November last year, was in recognition of Lyn's longstanding contributions to the community in her role as program coordinator and in particular the way she responded to the challenges of the COVID lockdowns, by organising the forum program on Zoom and later in hybrid format. All would agree that the award was well deserved.

In relation to the Committee, there are three initiatives that I wish to report on.

- In May we ran a workshop for tutors and facilitators on dealing with challenging situations. The workshop was facilitated by Gillian Cohen, who has extensive experience in counselling and facilitating groups, and provided an opportunity for tutors and Committee members to further develop our shared understandings of this important but complex area. The workshop was well attended and we all benefited from Gillian's depth of experience and positive contributions of tutors.
- During the year a sub-committee has been working on a review of our Rules of Association. In the main, the proposed changes reflect changes to our processes over the last ten years, but also a revision of the sections dealing with grievance disputes and disciplining members. I particularly want to acknowledge the efforts of both Peter Moore and Margaret Gibson on this initiative, the rest of the Committee for their careful consideration of the proposed changes over several meetings, and those members who attended the consultation forum in August, and who made thoughtful, positive suggestions. The proposed revisions to the Rules are presented as two motions for the consideration of the AGM.
- In June the Committee decided to transfer our membership administration system from our existing one (called MyU3A) to another one, called U-MAS that many Victorian U3As are using. The last couple of months have been busy: training sessions with Kevin Whelan, who leads the U3A Network Victoria's support team for U-MAS; checking the transfer of data to the new system; and preparation for the move, including training of office volunteers and an upcoming training session with tutors. The new system has a much more intuitive, modern looking interface, a number of enhanced features, and better integration with our website. We believe U-MAS is a more powerful system that will be easier for all of us to use: members, tutors and administrators. I want to acknowledge the many hours of work done by Committee members, and in particular Frank Moore, on this project.

Once again, I want to thank the members of the Committee for their support and hard work. Their positive, collegiate approach, eye for detail and diligence is invaluable. I thank: Peter Moore as Deputy President; Sue Kurt as Treasurer and Communications Officer; Lyn Watson as Program Coordinator; Margaret Gibson, who has been Correspondence Secretary; Frank Moore who has been Tutor Liaison Officer and managed the membership administration system; Jan Tinetti, who began the year as Secretary but unfortunately had to step aside due to ill health. Viv Blanksby, the Membership Secretary, very generously stepped in as acting Secretary for the rest of the year, while Christine Harrison also worked on the transfer to U-MAS and assisted with program coordination, until her retirement from the Committee. While not formally part of the Committee, Mary Walker has continued to manage the office and coordinate the office volunteers.

Finally, I am pleased to say that nearly all the existing Committee of Management are nominating for re-election. Our Rules of Association allow for nine elected members so if anyone wishes to nominate prior to our elections, I encourage you to do so. It is a marvellous way to contribute to our lively, flourishing organisation and community.

As we approach the end of the semester and 2022, I think we have much to be proud of. Our U3A provides many opportunities for social connectedness, learning, physical activity and just plain fun, and all of it provided by people who volunteer their time, energy and enthusiasm.