

I'd like to start by giving an overview of U3A Yarra City. Total active membership number has recently reached 400 for the first time ever. In 2017 we were 270 members. There was a levelling off during the Covid years, but this year membership has boomed. The growth in membership is welcomed as a sign that we are providing what people want. Our rapid membership growth does however raise an interesting question – what is the optimum size for our U3A? At what point does our community and neighbourhood “vibe” become overwhelmed by sheer administration complexity? I do not however believe that we have reached that barrier as yet.

Some other membership details - We are 75% female; this ratio has been slowly decreasing from the 78% in 2017. We are fairly typical of Australian U3A groups which range between  $\frac{2}{3}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  female, but my question is how we can appeal more to the males? Our average age profile is increasing which is of some concern. We as individuals all age, but as a group we need to ensure new younger members join. Gender and age are ongoing challenges.

I think what contributes to the attraction of our U3A to both existing and new members is that we are indeed engaged with our community. We do provide activities that are inward focussed, purely for the benefit of our members, but also others that are outward focussed, where we directly engage with the wider community. Prime examples are the Refugee Welcome Group, this year's very popular educational seminars on the First Nations Voice to Parliament and the various activities of our Ageing Well group.

It was very pleasing when we were finally returned to our spiritual home at the Collingwood Library. We enjoyed the facilities at Bargoonga Nganjin, and we continue to make use of each of the City of Yarra libraries, but there's no place like home. For the use of the library facilities and for other ongoing support we are deeply indebted to the City of Yarra and particularly to the Yarra libraries. I want to especially thank Lauren Brooker who is Yarra Council's Coordinator for Active and Healthy Ageing.

Our Committee of Management is made up entirely of volunteers. And a very hard-working, knowledgeable and cooperative group they are. Our monthly meetings seriously tackle the various issues that our U3A needs to deal with, to ensure that the group's program is developed and delivered effectively. In large measure we have been successful if our work is invisible to most members!

I want to acknowledge the work of our committee, David Lee (Deputy President and Program Coordinator), Viv Blanksby (Secretary and Membership Officer and tireless sender of Bulletins and Announcements), Sue Kurt (Treasurer), Frank Moore (IT, Member Database and Tutor Liaison), Barry Giddings (Health, Safety and Privacy Officer), Jan Tinetti (assisting with programming) and Margaret Gibson (Correspondence Secretary). In addition we have Mary Walker as an ex-officio member in her role as Office Coordinator. Despite each of us having designated roles, the mark of our effective committee is the willingness of all members to contribute across all topics under consideration. My special thanks go to David – my predecessor as President has been a great mentor and support into the intricacies of the role. With some sadness and trepidation I have to note that both David and Margaret have resigned from the committee, and I do want to thank both of them for their long and diligent contributions. Both have earned retirement from official responsibilities.

At this time last year we were in the midst of a transition from our old membership management system to a new one, called “U-MAS”. The new system has now been thoroughly embraced and the few teething troubles overcome. Frank Moore has been

fastidious and tenacious in chasing down problems and enabling things to get done, and has also liaised with our very helpful U3A Victoria Network U-MAS guru Kevin Whelan. David Lee, assisted by Jan Tinetti, has done the hours of work needed to get all our courses transferred across to the new system. With the new system bedded down we are now set up for a less hectic roll-over to the 2024 year.

As noted, Mary Walker coordinates the volunteers who look after our U3A office each week. The need for this has somewhat declined as more and more of us embrace the online world of email and internet, but still we do need the surety of the old systems for those members and external contacts who wish to continue with them. I do want to acknowledge the quiet contribution of these volunteers and to thank them for their work.

One of the highlights of our program has been the ongoing series of Tuesday morning Forums. For some years these have been organised by Lyn Watson. Lyn has a special skill at seeking out and gaining commitment from a diverse range of people enthusiastically presenting on an astonishing range of topics. I commend these talks to all members; please come along and enjoy them.

Our Publications and Promotions sub-committee this year has produced revised brochures and cards so that we can make our group visible to the wider community. For this we commissioned new photographs of members participating in various of our activities; the photos have been incorporated into the redesigned cards and brochures and are also being used on our website, Facebook pages and as large sized prints displayed at events.

The regular U3A Yarra City Newsletters are the work of another team – Tina Hocking, Lyn Morgan and Susannah Dax. Their output is a professional and informative update for all our members.

Last year we had a very special forum organised by our Ageing Well group, under the leadership of Helen Nankervis. For Seniors Month 2023 this U3A group has organised photographic exhibitions, a guided heritage bicycle ride and another forum – this time Gerard Mansour presenting findings of his report at the conclusion of his tenure as Commissioner for Senior Victorians, entitled “Ageing Well in a Changing World”. Again Yarra City Council have been very supportive of these activities.

Without volunteers our U3A doesn't happen. At all. There are multiple opportunities for volunteers and I can attest that it's a fabulous opportunity to not only contribute to the working of our U3A, but also to gain friendships, intellectual stimulation and just to have an enjoyable experience. There are always opportunities to join the Committee of Management, to work in the office, to be a Tutor in a course of your passionate interest, or to present at one of our Forums. Please get involved!

We all wish that Covid would just go away. To some degree it has, and over the last year an uneasy truce has prevailed. Vaccinations are still saving lives, especially in our cohort. Fingers crossed that there are no more Greek alphabet variants to again upset the apple cart!

At this end of 2023 we can congratulate ourselves on another successful year of enjoying activities in our U3A community. I thank all members for their continuing support and urge all members to consider how they can become more actively engaged.

Peter Moore