u3a friends

November 2026

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Introduction from Iain Cassidy

Dear Friends,

It's been a busy few weeks for u3a. Following the launch of our *Retirement Rewired* report at the House of Lords, it's great to see Michael Payne MP helping raise u3a's profile in Parliament and highlighting the difference our movement makes.

We've got some lovely member stories to share with you this month. Helen from Barnsley & District u3a has won an award for her fantastic work in the community, while members at Thanet u3a are making new friends through role-playing games. We also hear how u3a helped Patricia rediscover her passion for writing, and meet Droitwich u3a's Wind Instrument Group, whose musical adventures have taken them from village halls to steam trains.

And if all these stories have inspired you to get creative, have a go at our Short Story Competition. We'd love to see what you come up with!

With very best wishes

Iain Cassidy
CEO of the Third Age Trust

Headline photo: Trustee Pauline Green, Lord Norton of Louth, CEO Iain Cassidy and Michael Payne MP at the Retirement Rewired report launch in Parliament

friends news
from the Trust

Celebrating u3a at the House of Lords



Last month, we celebrated the launch of our *Retirement Rewired* report at the House of Lords, bringing together u3a members, MPs, peers and positive ageing organisations. Drawing on the experiences shared in our u3a and me survey, the report highlights how u3a helps members stay active, build friendships and make a difference in their communities.

Since speaking at the launch, Michael Payne MP has continued to champion u3a in Parliament. During a debate on lifelong learning, he highlighted the findings of Retirement Rewired and asked how a national lifelong learning strategy could better support organisations like u3a.

You can read the report on our website: u3a.org.uk/retirement-rewired

Rewiring retirement on BBC Radio 5 Live

Dame Pauline Green flew the flag for u3a on BBC Radio 5 Live Breakfast this week, challenging outdated ideas about retirement and celebrating the opportunities that later life can bring. Building on the findings of our *Retirement Rewired* report, Pauline shared why it's time to rethink what retirement means. Rather than seeing it as a time to slow down, she encouraged listeners to embrace the freedom to explore new interests, learn new skills and build friendships.

She also highlighted how u3a helps people make the most of this next chapter through learning, friendship and shared experiences. It was a fantastic opportunity to bring u3a's message to a national audience!

You can listen back on BBC Sounds: www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m00346x2.

Skip to 1 hour 16 minutes to hear Pauline's message and listeners' reactions, or 1 hour 55 minutes to catch her conversation with presenter Rachel Burden.

friends events

The soundtrack to our lives

u3a members have been sharing wonderful memories and favourite songs from their younger years as part of *u3a Rewind*. Visit the website to learn more: u3a.org.uk/u3a-rewind. Now it's time for another musical trip down memory lane.

Join u3a member David Tyas online on Monday 7 December at 2pm as he shares *A personal journey through the music in my life*. What songs bring back memories of the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s? Come along and reminisce!

To book your place please visit the online learning events page on our website: u3a.org.uk/online-events

friends offers

Your next adventure awaits with *u3a getaways*



Fancy a change of scenery? Join fellow u3a members on one of our specially designed getaways, combining new experiences, learning and friendship.

Looking ahead to 2027, learn about wildlife conservation at Dartmoor Zoo in April, or enjoy vineyard tours and expert-led wine tasting in Yorkshire in May.

Each getaway is an opportunity to explore somewhere new and meet u3a members from across the UK. Browse the trips and book your place on the website: u3a.org.uk/u3a-getaways.

Buy your 2027 diary

The diaries are available from the u3a Brand Shop. They are available to buy individually or there is a 25% discount if purchasing a pack of 10: ideal for committees, groups or getting the diaries for friends. Find out more on the website: u3a-shop.co.uk

friends news

from Council Chair, Sue Russell

It was lovely to share what the u3a Council has been up to at this year's AGM and talk about how we're making sure members' voices are heard.

Over the next year, we'll be focusing on some of the issues you've told us matter most. These include helping u3as attract and keep members and committee volunteers, improving communication, supporting smaller u3as and finding practical ways to tackle challenges such as banking difficulties. We'll also be looking at how we can better support u3as with marketing and social media.

The Council is here to represent you, so please keep sharing your ideas, experiences and concerns with your Council Representatives. We want to hear what's working well and where we can make things better.

And looking ahead to early next year, we'll be looking for new Council Representatives. If you'd like to help shape the future of u3a and make sure members' voices are heard, please do consider putting yourself forward when the time comes. We'd love to have you involved.

friends news
from the members

Helen wins an award for bringing u3a closer to home



Congratulations to Barnsley & District u3a member Helen Dew, who has won an Outstanding Contribution to the Older Person award at the Penistone Alliance Volunteer Awards 2026!

Helen has worked hard to bring u3a activities to Penistone, where travelling to groups in Barnsley can be difficult for members who don't drive. Starting with crown green bowling and Crafty chat, she has helped grow the number of local groups to 14, giving more people opportunities to learn, make friends and try something new.

Helen says, "I was surprised to be nominated and amazed to win! It was lovely to have our u3a recognised in the area and our members have been so nice congratulating and thanking me for all the work I do in Penistone."

A new adventure at Thanet u3a

From exploring fantasy worlds to solving mysteries together, members of Thanet u3a's new role-playing games group are discovering the fun of storytelling.

Group leader Lee Russell, an independent author with a love of science fiction, horror and fantasy, started the group to share his passion for role-playing games. During each session, members take on fictional characters and work together to overcome challenges, using their imagination and a roll of the dice to decide what happens next. No acting experience is needed, and there's plenty of laughter along the way.

Some members had never tried role-playing games before, but have since discovered a new hobby and made new friends. Lee says, "We're now friends around the table, with a shared experience of fun and excitement. It's a lovely place to be every Wednesday afternoon."

friends stories

When Patricia Evans joined Malvern u3a, she found more than new friendships. Through creative writing and other interest groups, she rediscovered her passion for storytelling and found the inspiration to return to a novel she'd put aside.

Discover how u3a helped Patricia find the confidence to pursue her writing ambitions and overcome challenges along the way, leading to the publication of her first novel, *Drawing Breath*.

Read Patricia's full story on our website: u3a.org.uk/latest-news

friends features

Making music together at Droitwich u3a



This month, we hear how Droitwich u3a's Wind Instrument Group has brought members together through a shared love of music, friendship and fun.

From playing on a moving steam train to entertaining crowds beside the River Wye, Droitwich u3a's Wind Instrument Group has found some wonderful places to share its love of music.

The group began in November 2015 with just two members, playing the euphonium and clarinet in someone's living room. Nearly 11 years later, it has grown to 16 musicians, playing everything from flutes and saxophones to trumpets and trombones. They've even outgrown members' homes and now meet in local village halls.

With playing experience ranging from 4 to over 50 years, members help one another develop their skills. Even the pandemic couldn't stop them making music together! Members recorded themselves playing at home, with one talented musician combining their performances into videos. When restrictions eased, they even held socially distanced rehearsals in a member's garden.

Recently their adventures have included Christmas carolling in Droitwich, playing aboard the Severn Valley Railway and entertaining spectators at Hereford's annual Wye Float, where they've dressed as everything from vikings to superheroes!

One member sums it up beautifully: "I'm so pleased to have discovered and joined the band. It is a lovely opportunity to play together with like-minded people, all keen to produce the best sound we can in a comfortable and enjoyable environment."

Pictured: Members of Droitwich u3a's Wind Instrument Group enjoying an outdoor rehearsal in a member's garden.

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