

THE BIG CARE DEBATE – DECEMBER 2012

Following the House of Lords event that united 100 U3A members with 100 sixth-form students last December, four U3As staged another intergenerational debate, this time at a south London school.

Beryl Mellish, national U3A vice chairman and a member of Christchurch U3A, co-coordinated the event at Hayes School in Bromley with Tim Green, a teaching and learning consultant, who acted as chair. With help from Sevenoaks, Bromley and Orpington U3A members, the pair realised an idea put up at the House of Lords debate by John Lloyd from Wearside U3A. He had said: "I hope that all the students who are here will talk to students in other schools about this debate and every member of the U3A goes back and talks to their U3A about the potential of being involved in the Big Care Debate."

The Bromley debate continued to examine social responsibility, this time through the prism of education. Four teams of two students and one U3A member each took a different stance on who should be responsible for learning: the individual, their family, the state/schools or society. Participating were Hayes School, Darrick Wood School, Newstead Wood School and Bullers Wood School who joined forces with U3A members from Bromley, Sevenoaks and Falmouth.

George from Hayes School launched the view that individuals are best placed to identify their own specific needs. Darrick Wood's voice for the state/schools, Jade, countered this highlighting the statutory benefits of learning through the central system.

Isobel from Newstead Wood argued for the value of skills and education provided by a society that aims to cover everybody's needs. Camilla of Bullers Wood School, said that family, "the closest people", can provide a personalised education with developmental and moral learning supplementing traditional education.

Lesley Spence (Sevenoaks U3A) supported the individual viewpoint stressing that education requires personal responsibility and commitment therefore encouraging pro-active behaviour. Bernard Wilson (Bromley U3A) said that education requires a structured way of measuring performance, the delivery of which depends upon a school environment.

Pat Apps (Bromley U3A) said that lifelong learning is fed by schools, businesses, charities, voluntary organisations, the media, and the internet.

Ian Searle (Carrick U3A and the recently retired national U3A chairman) said that families should make sure their members have the opportunity to become enlightened and enthusiastic, starting with bedtime stories and encouraging curiosity. The argument on behalf of the individual came out on top. Alex Just from the English Speaking Union announced that the ESU will continue debate training and will work with the Third Age Trust to this end.

