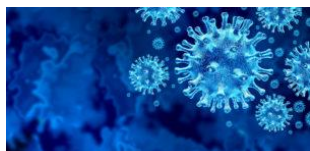


Beacon Newsletter : April 2020



Membership fees post-crisis



Some U3As are spending less money during the crisis and are looking for how they can compensate their members. Beacon will support you once you have made your decision.

There has been discussion recently about how U3As manage membership subscriptions during and after the present emergency. All U3As have had their activities curtailed. Visits and holidays are out of the question. Most groups are unable to operate normally, or at all.

Some U3As have found that they are spending less money than usual and are thinking about how they might ensure that their members receive good value from their subscription payments. Ideas that have been suggested include extending the membership year for a few months or allowing existing members to renew at a reduced rate.

It's not the place of this site to tell U3As what to do about membership fees. Each U3A should check its constitution before making any decision and seek advice directly from the Third Age Trust if necessary. If you are thinking of changing your membership year or rates then some of the implications are discussed in the knowledge base on the new Beacon Help Centre.

Using Beacon to keep in touch during the lockdown



This website recently asked readers how they had been using Beacon to provide information and help members during the crisis. Hugh Scott of Downe U3A told us that they'd used Beacon to inform the membership about suspended activities. They'd provided three contact numbers that members could use to ask for

any help, or just to hear a friendly voice.

The Downe U3A secretary had also sent out a quiz to 'exercise the mind'.

Terry Cash and his U3A, Dunmow in Essex, has provided an object lesson in using Beacon to its full potential. His email is worth quoting in full.

"Since Covid-19 began to take a hold, the first days of panic buying and the start of restrictions to movement, Dunmow U3A's Beacon system has been a lifeline for its 600 members. Beacon was first used to communicate quickly and effectively with all members to pass essential information about classes and meetings.

"When it became clear that we could no longer meet in groups, daily news and information bulletins have kept our members informed about where scarce commodities might be bought, how to contact pop up shops and local delivery companies that had supplies of food and goods that supermarkets had been stripped of and most importantly, where to get help.

"The Beacon system soon became a portal for the exchange of information and a mechanism for the more vulnerable members of our organisation to be able to call for assistance. This led to a large volunteer force being mobilised to cater for the needs of anyone in need.

"Regular blogs have kept members amused and entertained, along with ideas generated by the membership and shared with others through the Beacon system with things to do, ways of setting up video chats with friends and family and establishing a network of telephone callers to maintain one on one contact with those living alone and in need of company.

"This is just the beginning, we have far to go, but the members now have a proven mechanism for communicating quickly and efficiently that can only grow in importance over the months to come."

Terry added in a further email "Beacon has been a life saver for us, literally".

Dunmow are lucky to have such a dynamic committee but I'm sure they're not unique.

New Beacon Help Centre



The Beacon team are pleased to announce the Beacon Help Centre, a new place for all Beacon help, support and training. But, I hear you say, surely they've only had the old helpdesk for a few months. Why change?

Capacity, for one thing. Now that Beacon has more than 400 U3As the volume of calls has outgrown the old system.

Beacon Help Centre is provided by Zendesk, one of the world's largest helpdesk providers, and has ample capacity no matter how much Beacon grows. And APT, the supplier of the Beacon upgrade, are already Zendesk users so this move will help them to support us into the future.

If you have submitted tickets on the old system then rest assured they will be addressed. New requests for help should be made at u3abeacon.zendesk.com.

Beacon Help Centre is more than a helpdesk. There's a knowledge base that may answer your question and this will grow over time. We're also moving the popular training guides onto the new platform.

We're confident that Beacon Help Centre will allow us to provide timely help and support to Beacon users well into the future.