

COUNTESTHORPE u3a

ACCESSIBILITY POLICY

1 INITIAL PRINCIPLES

Countesthorpe u3a will do all it can to be as accessible as possible both to its existing members and to others within its local community who may wish to join. It will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people with disabilities can attend the interest groups of their choice, without necessarily needing a companion/carer with them. It will reassure them that it will do all it can to support them and make their attendance as easy and as stress-free as possible.

There are many things that may affect someone's ability to attend u3a activities e.g. physical disabilities, visual or hearing loss, mental health difficulties or dementia. Many of these can be overcome by reasonable adjustments to enable them to access our activities.

Members who cannot manage to participate in their chosen u3a activities without help will be given the opportunity to bring a companion/carer with them who, for the time that they are in attendance, will be covered by the liability insurance provided by the Third Age Trust. The companion/carer would not be required to pay anything unless he/she is a u3a member and wishes also to be recognised as a fully participating member of the group, in which case payment would then be required. A professionally employed carer would need to be insured by his/her individual liability policy.

Where a member has mobility issues, the carer or companion should be able to assist the person completely and not rely on the goodwill of other members to assist their carer or companion.

2. EXTERNAL MEETING VENUES

As far as possible Countesthorpe u3a will ensure that venues fulfil the following criteria:-

- a) Adequate, convenient car parking facilities including disabled parking bays.
- b) Ground floor accommodation.
- c) Accessible and usable disabled toilet facilities.
- d) Good disabled access to all areas.
- e) A sound system and loop.
- f) Adequate provision for wheelchairs/mobility scooters.
- g) Sufficient lighting.
- h) Ability to modify heating/air conditioning controls when necessary.
- i) Ideally, served by convenient public transport

In addition the following will apply:-

- Having a designated person at general meetings to ensure disabled members are provided with appropriate seating – e.g. at the front for those who have vision or hearing loss, and at the end of a row for those with mobility problems etc.
- Ensuring that the timing and length of meetings are appropriate – with suitable breaks incorporated where feasible

If a member requires reasonable adjustments to help them participate fully in the meetings, they should ideally contact a committee member in advance to discuss these.

3. VENUES – INTEREST/ACTIVITY GROUPS

Countesthorpe u3a is aware that the use of members' homes might pose accessibility problems – in which case an alternative or outside venue will be sought. Group Leaders will play an essential role in assessing the needs of their individual members. A member's home may be perfectly acceptable if it has, for example, a level entrance, wide doorway/s, a ground floor toilet and no internal steps. If a disabled member wishes to attend a group, but which is currently held in an unsuitable house, then other options will be investigated.

4. OUTINGS/HOLIDAYS

The organiser of an outing should research accessibility as far as reasonably possible in advance of any trip and inform members of likely difficulties. They will not be expected to make any guarantee of accessibility. Any member who needs help is welcome to bring a carer with them. Where a carer or companion accompanies a member on an outing, the member must pay their cost for the outing as well as that for themselves. Many venues do not charge for carers or companions when they are accompanying a person with a disability such as significant visual or hearing impairment. If the venue does not charge for the carer the member should only be asked to pay for the carer's transport.

5. COMMUNICATION

- a) The Management Committee will ensure that all members are aware of this policy and its provisions. It will be available on the archive section of the Countesthorpe u3a website. This policy will also be drawn to the attention of relevant bodies such as funding agencies, stakeholders etc. where it is appropriate to do so.
- b) Any member experiencing difficulties because of disability is requested to make this known to a committee member without delay.
- c) A designated member of the committee will take responsibility for maintaining contact with those who have notified the committee to ensure that their participation in **u3a** is not compromised. This should allow all members with a disability to continue to be able to participate and enjoy u3a activities and, at the same time, avoid other members getting involved in providing assistance which they are neither qualified nor insured to do.

6. SHOULD DIFFICULTIES ARISE

Our aim is to be welcoming and inclusive to all members and to make reasonable adjustments to the way we operate to accommodate the needs of members with a range of disabilities.

However, we are unable to provide care for individual members.

Where a member does not have a carer and relies on the goodwill of other members to assist them in accessing premises or activities without agreeing this in advance with the members, or if the situation arises where a carer is unable to fully assist the person and relies on the goodwill of other members to assist them, the Group Leader or Organiser must decide whether this is reasonable or if the need to take action, e.g to prevent a member from sustaining an injury.

If the situation arises where a particular member's participation in a group is having a negative effect on the whole group, the Group Leader or Organiser should take action by raising concerns with the Committee. Options may include the Group Leader or a Committee Member discussing this with the member to see if there is a way around the situation.

You should only speak to a family member or another person responsible for the member if they are unable to manage their own affairs or they give their consent.

The advice from the Third Age Trust is that u3as should not take responsibility for the care of an individual member with disabilities, and that when making adjustments, their needs should not override the successful running of the group.

In these circumstances, it is unlikely that the u3a would be considered to be acting in a discriminatory way by asking a member to leave a group, or even the u3a, but before considering this, the Group Leader must discuss the circumstances with the Committee and only act with their agreement.

ADDENDUM 1

PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR GROUP LEADERS AND ORGANISERS ON WAYS THAT YOU CAN HELP MEMBERS WITH VISUAL AND HEARING LOSS

Members with visual loss

There are some practical tips that may be helpful to members with vision loss, but most members with vision loss will know the things that are helpful to them. We can suggest taking seats close to the front of any meetings and reducing glare from lighting or windows. If members let the Group Leader, Organiser or Speaker know in advance, then specific arrangements may be able to be made.

There are ways of making printed information more accessible, by using type size 14 or larger, using a clear font for everyone such as Arial or Verdana, avoiding italics and decorative fonts. It's best to have a good contrast between the text and the background, such as black on white or dark blue on cream, and avoiding coloured lettering and glossy finishes. Some members may have their own technology aides.

Members with hearing loss

Hearing loss can be difficult for members to admit to, so sensitivity is needed. All of us lose hearing quite significantly with age, so the level of hearing in any of our groups will be variable.

- Wherever possible, use venues which are equipped with hearing loops, and sound system.
- Try to reduce external noise as far as possible, and encourage those who have hearing loss to sit where it would help them most.
- At group meetings you should ask group members to take turns in speaking, so they can be heard more clearly, and having pen and paper to hand may be useful. Some written notes might be helpful in some circumstances.
- To communicate well with someone with a hearing loss, say the person's name before beginning a conversation, and ask if they have better hearing in one ear, then be in the best place for the person. Speak clearly without shouting or exaggerating mouth movements, speaking at normal speed or slightly slower, pausing between sentences.
- Use plain language and avoid long sentences.
- If you know that someone is lip reading, face them and get their attention before speaking. Keep your hands away from your face while talking. Try to avoid lighting which is too low, or shines into the person's eyes. Having the room set out horseshoe style is better than rows of chairs. Consider using a microphone, but try not to obscure your face with it.

ADDENDUM 2

PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR GROUP LEADERS AND ORGANISERS IN MAKING OUR U3A DEMENTIA FRIENDLY

Dementia describes different brain disorders that trigger a loss of brain function. These conditions are all usually progressive, and Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia, affecting 62% of those diagnosed. There are 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK; of these 40,000 are younger than 65.

Symptoms can include:

- Memory loss
- Difficulty with communication and reasoning skills
- Changes in emotional behaviour (becoming sad or angry)
- Disorientation (confusion about time and place, even in familiar surroundings)
- Confused perception of physical environment (eg, a doormat may be perceived as a puddle)

Treatment focuses on slowing the progression of the disease and maintaining the individual's quality of life. Social isolation is known to exacerbate the symptoms of people living with dementia. As a **u3a**, we can therefore make an important contribution to the individual's well-being.

Making Our u3a Dementia-Friendly

The understanding and support of the broad membership are both needed to create a dementia-friendly environment.

Key Messages

- Hope: People living with dementia can have a good quality of life, provided that they remain involved in everyday life, including attending our **u3a**.
- Dignity: Be aware that dementia does not necessarily equate with loss of intellect, and everyone is affected differently
- Understanding: Being unable to communicate something important is frustrating – especially so when this is due to memory loss or reasoning processes.
- Be a Friend: If you know someone with dementia, treat them as you always have done, show that you are pleased to see them or perhaps share a joke.

Actions

- Speak clearly and in short sentences
- Listen to what the person is saying
- A small amount of knowledge can enable a great amount of change
- Involve the family members and carers, where possible. Remember that a carer can attend with the member who has dementia and need not become a member and pay, but will still be covered by **u3a** Public Liability Insurance (this does not apply to paid carers)
- See if you can persuade at least one member to become a Dementia Friend's Champion
- If you have a carer/family member amongst your members, ask them to share their experiences.
- Most **u3as** have a significant number of members who live on their own and it is possible that the symptoms of dementia will first be noticed by friends at our **u3a**. If you are worried

about someone's memory, suggest they read the Alzheimer's Society leaflet "Worried About Your Memory?" and see if you can persuade the person to see their GP and offer to go with them. If possible contact a relative. Bear in mind that the person may be anxious and quite frightened about this as they may be aware that they are having some difficulties.

Making Open Meetings Accessible

- Encourage the member to bring a family member or carer with them
- Have clear signage – for coffee, toilets, etc
- Don't be afraid of saying the wrong thing – it is better to be friendly than not to speak at all, and use clear and uncomplicated language.

Making Interest/Activity Groups Accessible

- Use people's names more than usual, so that the member knows who's who
- Explain the format of the group and what is going to happen in the session
- Be patient
- Encourage all group members to be welcoming
- Sometimes, changes in someone's behaviour may cause an issue. If this happens, try to lead the member to a quiet space and sort it out in a positive manner with little fuss.

Simple Ways You Can Help People With Dementia

- Offer reassurance and understanding – put someone experiencing difficulties at ease
- Communicate clearly - listen carefully and use simple, short sentences when speaking to someone with dementia
- Be aware of the surroundings – noisy or busy environments can make people with dementia uneasy or add to their confusion. Consider how features of the environment may affect someone
- Ensure any signage is clear and people can find what they want easily.