

# u3a friends

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Dear Jackie,

As the days get longer, I hope you are enjoying getting out in the sunshine with your u3a interest groups. u3a isn't just about learning and skill sharing - for so many, it's a way of discovering community in later life.

This newsletter celebrates that community - with members' stories of the support, friendship and connections they've found through u3a. We're also sharing our new animated film, which highlights how u3a offers connection and purpose in retirement. Tonbridge u3a member Julie's story, at the end of this newsletter, demonstrates this - as she shares how, for her, u3a made a new town feel like home.

Our movement will be joining together at *u3a Festival 26* at the *University of York* in July. We're delighted to announce that Johnny Ball will be opening the Festival. His joyful approach to learning matches the u3a spirit and will be the perfect start to three days of skill sharing and fun.

With very best wishes

Iain Cassidy  
CEO of the Third Age Trust

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## In this issue...

Making music, memories and mates with u3a

Add your museum visit to our archive

Finding community somewhere new

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## Bitesize Newsletter

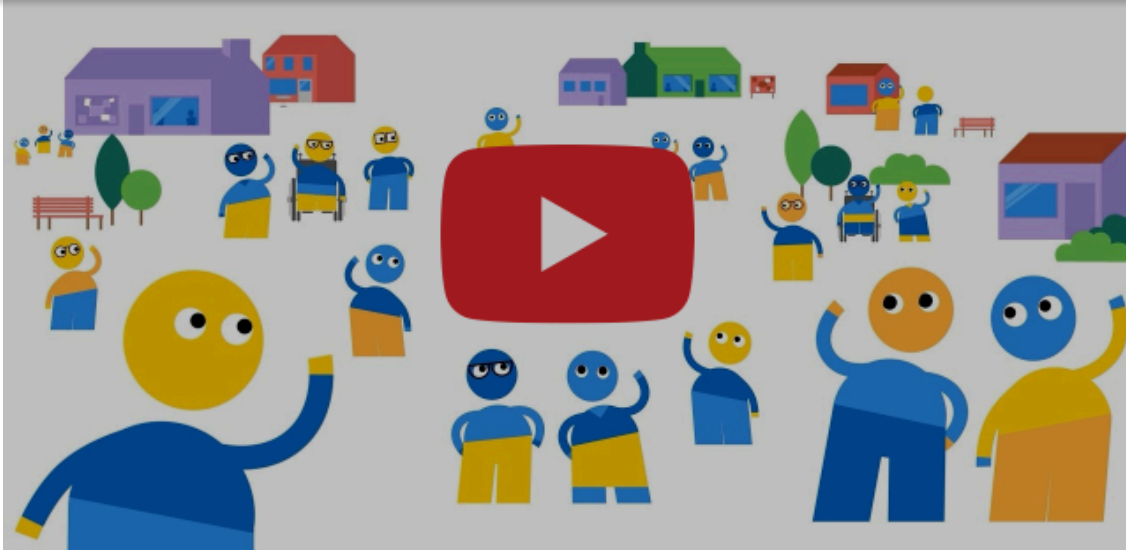
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**friends news** 

**...from the Trust**



### **Live later life to the full - a new u3a film**

Our new [animated film](#) showcases the community and fun to be found within u3a. So take a moment to get a cup of tea and enjoy the film. Please do share far and wide with friends and family to get the message out about how wonderful u3a is.

### **A big cheer for Clive and Sheryl**

TCS London Marathon is taking place on Saturday 26 April. We're delighted that we have two runners taking part - Charnwood u3a member Clive and Sheryl, whose mum is a member of West Bridgford u3a. They are raising money for the u3a movement - ensuring that u3a is always there as a place to learn and make new friends in later life. Donating is a tangible way of supporting u3a. Find out more on [the fundraising page](#).



### u3a members visit House of Lords

u3a members from across the UK were invited to the House of Lords this week. The visit included a tour before a lively panel discussion and lunch with selected peers, who all had an interest in u3a's model of positive ageing through informal learning.

This visit was part of our ongoing engagement with Parliament, strengthening awareness of u3a and championing the vital contribution our movement makes to individuals, communities and society as a whole.

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**friends events** 

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With special guest

# JOHNNY BALL

Music & dance   Sport & wellbeing   Hands on workshops   Talks & walks

Just some of the activities on offer:

## WEDNESDAY

\* Opening ceremony with Johnny Ball \*  
 Staying safe online \* Guitar \* Dance exercise \* Improv \*  
 Laughter yoga \* Climate Matters \* Jewellery making \*

## THURSDAY

Photography \* Futurology \* Playing jazz \* Steel band \*  
 Men who challenge misogyny \* Beginners painting \* AI \*  
 Chair yoga \* Pub quiz \* Wine appreciation

## FRIDAY

Dystopias \* Destress your life \* Dance choreography \*  
 Flower arranging \* How to be happier \* Forest bathing \*  
 Ceilidh \* Handbells \* Crosswords \* Museum visits

**plus more surprises to be announced!**

## Johnny Ball headlines *u3a Festival 26*

We are delighted to announce that iconic TV legend, Johnny Ball, will be opening *u3a Festival 26*. Known for his fun approach to learning, Johnny's opening event will set the scene for three days of joyful skill sharing.

With over 35 activities a day, *u3a Festival 26* promises to encapsulate the creativity, innovation and excitement of the *u3a* movement. Be part of the fun - [book your tickets now.](#)



## Could you lead a sports event at u3a Festival 26?

We're working to create a vibrant and dynamic programme at u3a Festival 26 but, as a member-led event, we need your help to cover a wide range of activities. We are currently looking for volunteers to lead the following sports events:

**Walking Football**

**Tennis**

**Kurling**

**Croquet**

Please get in touch by emailing [festival@u3a.org.uk](mailto:festival@u3a.org.uk). Members leading sports events will get a free ticket to the Festival on the day that they are volunteering.

## Discover Beethoven's musical masterpieces

Join us on Thursday 26 March at 2pm for our online talk, *Deafness and beyond: the tribulation and triumph of Ludwig van Beethoven*. Beethoven experienced distress in his early 30s when he realised he was becoming deaf. In this talk, Professor Christopher Dowrick shows how he turned this pain into some of the most profound music ever created.

Other upcoming national learning events include *The cancer research revolution and reasons for optimism*, *The Truth in Ten*, and *Can virtual reality really enhance our lives?*

[Join your local u3a](#) to be able to come to these events, and more.

# friends news

## ...from the members



### **Making music, mates and memories with u3a**

Oswestry u3a's Ozukes band started as an idea between friends and now, three years later, is a successful ukulele band of 40 musicians. The group perform at gigs, with 15 performances planned for 2026. And, while the group predominantly play ukuleles, the band includes a Cajon drummer and percussion and bass players too!

Group leader Janet says, “The requirements to join Ozukes are u3a membership, plus enthusiasm and a willingness to try something new. A number of complete novices who learnt to play with Ozukes are now regulars at our gigs.”

Janet continues, “Ozukes is a group of friends, bound by a passion for playing our Ukuleles and having fun. We play an eclectic mix of popular music that makes us, and our audiences, smile and feel good.”



## Woodworking for wildlife

Southwell u3a's woodwork & chat group have put their skills to good purpose in their local community. The group, which meets every week, have created a range of boxes for their local park which will serve as homes for small birds, owls, bats and hedgehogs. The boxes were handed over to *Fiskerton Friends of the Village Green* this month and they're already being put into place, ready to welcome wildlife this spring.

## Knitting for Ukraine

Botley, Hedge End and District u3a's knit and natter group have been using their monthly meetings to make items for displaced people from Ukraine. The group knit squares - perfect to do while having a chat. These are then sewn together to make lap and single bed blankets. This is an amazing example of the huge contribution u3a members can make to their community just by sharing their skills and talents.

For more u3a news, read our [blog](#)

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**friends stories** 

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South Lakes u3a is lucky to have a vibrant and enthusiastic group leader, Margot, who has led the moving to music group for the past 25 years.

In secondary school, the buzz of giving the night away to rock and roll embedded an enthusiasm for dance that has continued throughout her life.

Passionate about the importance of health-based activities for older people, Margot set up the first Moving to Music session in October 2000.

Margot loves thinking up new sequences and finds real joy in seeing what the groups achieve. A 91-year-old is the oldest member! The most important thing is that everyone enjoys the sessions, irrespective of their 'level'. Margot can not see a time when she does not want to run these groups and hopes to be able to continue for a few more years yet. We all hope so too.

*Liz, South Lakes u3a*

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# friends learning



## **Add your museum visit to an archive for u3a members**

Our learning activity, *Virtual Visits*, turns u3a members' cultural visits into an online archive of presentations.

record and taking some photos. [Find out more on the Virtual Visits page.](#)

See more learning opportunities on our website

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# friends news

## ... from Council Chair, Sue Russell

This year has been exciting for the Council as we have been finding our feet and clarifying our role. In April we say goodbye and thank you to some members who previously served as Trustees on the Board. We will be welcoming new Council Representatives, with all regions except West Midlands having two representatives.

As the Council's role is to feed back the wishes and needs of the membership to the Third Age Trust, Council Representatives will be out and about in the coming months talking to u3a members and hearing what they have to say

Recently, the Council has been considering Regional Support Teams and their role. One-size does not fit all - some regions don't need one while in others, some well established teams are charities. The work on this will feed into the Third Age Trust Strategic Plan. The Council is also looking at ways to help small u3as - often in rural areas. We've been working with the Trust to set up training workshops across the regions. Some have already taken place, and more are planned in the coming months.

Task and Finish groups are being set up with specific focuses, such as Recruitment and Retention, a problem for many u3as. As Council Representatives meet u3as, further Task and Finish groups will be set up to help with recurring issues.

The Council is all about two-way conversations with u3as - so [please do contact your Council Representative](#) if there's anything you'd like to raise.

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# friends offers



### 30% off epic adventures with *HX Expeditions*

This year, cruise company *HX Expeditions* celebrates 130 years of exploration. For well over a century, they've been taking curious travellers to the world's most fascinating destinations - from Antarctica to Scotland's hidden landscapes. Celebrate with *HX* in 2026 and save up to 30% on all-inclusive adventures, combinable with your 5% u3a discount. Quote HX-UK-U3A to claim. [Explore the trips on the \*HX\* website.](#)

### 25% off *English Heritage* annual memberships

Enjoy unlimited entry to over 400 historic places across England with 25% off *English Heritage* annual memberships, available through *u3a Friends Extra*. From legendary and iconic sites such as *Stonehenge* to the country's most beautiful historic castles, there's so much to explore - and up to six children can go for free with every adult member. [Find out more on the \*Friends Extra\* website.](#)

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## friends stories

In Orpington u3a I run a Canasta Hand and Foot teaching group twice a month in our local care home. They contacted our u3a offering a space

My group started last summer and has grown to 12 members. It's a great partnership and we spread details of u3a to all who show interest in us.

*Janet, Orpington u3a*

## friends features



### Finding community somewhere new

[Tonbridge u3a member Julie shares how u3a helped her start a new life.](#)

Why did I move to Tonbridge, leaving my comfortable, familiar life of three and a half decades to start again? I knew that walking away from our history, friends, colleagues and students would be difficult. But the impact of widowhood, COVID and a settled family in Tonbridge lured me south from Suffolk.

I knew of u3a and so, in an effort to meet people of my own age and interests, I went to a coffee morning. A friendly welcome, a cuppa and a chat resulted in me being signed up on the day. As a member of the cycling group, country walking group and theatre committee, I met a lot of people quickly. Soon I was invited to events beyond the regular meetings and I began to establish some roots. My connections with people in the town were beginning to form a social life.

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others. You have to go out and make an effort because a new life is very unlikely to drop randomly in to your lap.

Now on the management committee and serving as the theatre for all coordinator, I am grateful for so many wonderful opportunities during the past five years. I've met some extraordinary people, made good friends and I'm now feeling more part of life in Tonbridge.

*[Did joining u3a change your life? Let us know by emailing communications@u3a.org.uk.](mailto:communications@u3a.org.uk)*

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A blue banner with white text and a yellow circle on the right. The text reads: "To participate in online learning activities and events, join your local u3a" followed by "u3a.org.uk" with a yellow underline. The u3a friends logo is in the bottom right corner.

To participate in online learning activities and events, join your local u3a

[u3a.org.uk](https://u3a.org.uk)

u3a friends



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