



PORT FAIRY
UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE



ANNUAL REPORT

2021

U3A PORT FAIRY INC

U3A PORT FAIRY, PO Box 136 Port Fairy, VIC 328

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30 Courses including, Bridge, Textiles, Guilfoyle Gardens, Gallery Tours and Fascinating Women

COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT

President: Kate Donelan

Vice President, Planning and Communications: Maggie Currie

Secretary: Maureen Joyce (Resigned in September 2021)

Secretary: Sue Knudsen (from September 2021)

Treasurer: Carole Howlett

Course Coordinator: Sue Goy

Membership Officer: Jill Burgoyne

PFCH Liaison: Mary Kerr:

Committee Member: David Wilson

Committee Member: Lorraine Mielnik

U3A PORT FAIRY: PURPOSES AND MODEL

The University of the Third Age (U3A) is an international organization embodying the principles of lifelong learning and social interaction for seniors who are retired or semi-retired. Through participation in U3A courses and activities the health and well-being of seniors within the community is enhanced.

The U3A movement offers a low-cost model of active, positive ageing. Retired and semi-retired people come together and learn together, not for qualifications but for its own reward:

the sheer joy of discovery!

Members share their skills and life experiences: the learners teach, and the teachers learn, and there is no distinction between them.

The purposes of U3A Port Fairy are:

- *to promote lifelong learning for retired and semi-retired people in and around Port Fairy;*
- *to provide opportunities for members to share knowledge, skills and experiences through educational, creative and recreational courses and activities;*
- *to develop programs which advance healthy, active and positive ageing through social inclusion and engagement.*

U3A Port Fairy is a community organization run entirely by volunteers. Members plan, coordinate and lead courses and organize activities, and through an elected Committee of Management undertake governance, networking, marketing and advocacy. The U3A model enables the annual member fee to be kept low.

Overview of 2021

I am delighted to present U3A Port Fairy's Annual Report for 2021. This is our first year as an incorporated organisation, a significant milestone for U3A Port Fairy as we moved from an organisation auspiced by Port Fairy Community House to a legal entity in our own right.

Following the suspension of our programs in 2020 due to COVID-19, 2021 proceeded more smoothly, although there were significant disruptions to courses in August and September. A major task for the Committee of Management in 2021 was to respond to changing COVID regulations, adapt the program to protect members' health and safety, update COVID-safety policies and procedures, and communicate with members in a volatile public health environment. In spite of the challenges, we completed 2021 in a sound financial position with increased membership numbers, an expanded program, and more participation by members in the delivery of new courses and in assisting the Committee with specific tasks.

Committee of Management 2021

The following members of the Committee of Management were elected for 2021:

Kate Donelan (President), Maggie Currie (Vice-President, Planning and Communications), Maureen Joyce (Secretary), Carole Howlett (Treasurer), Sue Goy (Course Coordinator), Jill Burgoyne (Membership Officer), Mary Kerr (PFCH Liaison), Sue Knudsen (Minutes Secretary). Two new Committee members were elected: Lorraine Mielnik and David Wilson who added valuable skills in governance, risk management and community projects.

With membership numbers growing, an increase in courses, and COVID-safety policies to manage, the workload of Committee members grew in scale and complexity in 2021. Responsibilities included: marketing and communications, program development, support for course leaders, technology and venue management, processing memberships, liaising with U3A Network Victoria, building community partnerships, monitoring finance and risk, organising social activities and special events as well as governance and strategic planning for U3A Port Fairy's future. Most Committee members also led courses which reflected their commitment to U3A Port Fairy and their passion for learning!

Maureen Joyce, the inaugural Secretary of U3A Port Fairy, resigned from the Committee of Management in September following her move to Adelaide with her partner and former Committee member, John Walker. Maureen has made an outstanding contribution to the development of U3A Port Fairy as a skilled administrator with knowledge and experience in communication technologies. Maureen advocated for U3A Port Fairy in the region, communicated regularly with the peak body and actively contributed to State-wide forums on our successful marketing strategies. She was also a creative course leader. We miss her greatly, although she continues to support us through her subcommittee work with Maggie Currie on the Newsletter!

We are very pleased that Sue Knudsen took on the role of Secretary from 30 September.

My sincere thanks to the 2021 U3A Port Fairy Committee of Management for their commitment and hard work throughout 2021. I believe U3A Port Fairy has flourished under their skilled leadership, planning and organisation of all that we do.

Planning and delivering a COVID-safe Program

The Committee prepared the 2021 program carefully, giving priority to members' safety and well-being, in a context of changing COVID regulations and public health advice. We managed COVID space restrictions and density limits by introducing a range of new small interest groups as well as increasing the number of courses held outside, with field trips, walks, and excursions. COVID-safety measure included wearing masks, checking in, maintaining physical distancing and reducing the length of classes held inside. With the use of the renovated Cottage space at Community House as well as the Yacht Club we were able to accommodate larger groups within density limits. However finding appropriate venues for our courses remained a challenge, and the need to support course leaders who were managing unfamiliar technology and equipment in different venues became a priority.

In January we held a well-publicised and successful Enrolment Day at PFCH to launch the Semester One program of over 30 courses. Enrolment numbers were strong, and we ran two streams of popular courses to keep class numbers small. Popular courses included: Ecology of South-West Victoria, History of Port Fairy, The First Australians, The Great Composers, Family History, Fascinating 20th century Women, Gallery visits, Guilfoyle Botanic Gardens of Western Victoria, and Mahjong.

Three courses were delivered by zoom to ensure the continuity of the program in case of another lockdown. Enrolments slowly increased in zoom-based courses as members became more confident with online participation in discussions, and forums. However, members indicated they preferred a face-to-face mode of delivery. Individual mentoring of members who lacked confidence in zoom technology was a successful strategy to encourage online participation.

Semester One was completed with minimal interruption to our planned program. Members embraced the COVID-safe program, understanding the need to limit participant numbers in courses. We recruited a number of new coordinators and course leaders and provided them with mentoring as well as technical and moral support. The Semester 2 program commenced as planned with some new courses and others that were ongoing. Unfortunately, COVID outbreaks disrupted the program in August and September. All face-to-face courses had to be cancelled until the start of October although field-based courses were able to re-commence earlier. Planned large group activities were not held for the rest of the year.



U3A members at the Port Fairy Markets and out and about

Communication with U3A Members

During this difficult period, course leaders kept the momentum going by sharing resources, designing self-paced activities and facilitating discussions via zoom and email. Members expressed appreciation for these efforts to connect, offer stimulation and stay in touch in spite of the full and partial lockdowns.

The attractive and engaging bi-monthly Newsletters were an effective means of communicating with our U3A Port Fairy community in a second year of the pandemic. The Committee of Management also ensured that course leaders were fully informed, consulted and given recognition for their contributions. Forums with course leaders at the end of each Semester provided valuable information about courses and the needs of our members and these discussions informed our planning.

The success of the strategies we used in 2021 to raise awareness of U3A, communicate with our membership, provide stimulating COVID-safe activities, promote social connectedness and reduce isolation during this challenging time were recognised by the peak body, U3A Network Victoria.

Membership

To acknowledge the difficulties of 2020 we offered all financial members a \$20 fee reduction for 2021. Assisted by a grant from Community Bank Port Fairy, a mailout to households in Port Fairy and surrounding communities attracted new members from a broader catchment area. By the end of 2021 there were 187 members: 29% were new members and about 15% were from beyond Port Fairy.

The U3A Committee and members were shocked and deeply saddened to hear of the death of Dr Steve Mackey on Saturday 26 June. Steve developed and led our popular Philosophy courses from 2019-2021. He was a highly respected and dedicated course leader. Steve's wife, Lorraine is now a valued member of our Committee of Management.

Incorporation and ongoing relationship with PFCH

The auspice arrangement with Port Fairy Community House concluded on 24 March 2021 when U3A Port Fairy was incorporated. U3A Port Fairy maintains its closed relationship with PFCH through an MOU between the two organisations that is reviewed annually. Port Fairy Community House continues to be our base, its rooms used for many of our courses, for committee meetings, and for storage of equipment. Although we are no longer auspiced, the Committee of Management decided, in recognition of the importance of our ongoing relationship, to continue to require U3A members to be financial members of PFCH. The Committee appreciates the ongoing support of staff at PFCH and their assistance to U3A members and course leaders.

Community Partnerships

We have continued to develop new partnerships with community organisations. In addition to staff at Port Fairy Community House we sincerely thank the following community organisations for their support and assistance during 2021: Blarney Books and Art - our host for last year's and today's AGM; the Community Bank Port Fairy for their grant for marketing of U3A Port Fairy and their sponsorship for a new lecture program for 2022. We also value our collaborations with Port Fairy Historical Society, and the Port Fairy Yacht Club, St Johns' Anglican Church and Port Fairy Lifesaving Club who provided low-cost additional venues for courses with larger enrolments. COVID made it more difficult to communicate directly with Moyne Council and our plans for collaborative events during Seniors week in and beyond Port Fairy did not proceed. We will continue to raise awareness of U3A's important role in the community and the well-being and health benefits to seniors of participation in our programs.

We would also like to acknowledge the support of many Port Fairy traders who contributed generously to our Tomato Festival and who allowed us to display material about U3A programs. This Festival was designed to engage and connect members of our community at a time when we could not meet safely as a large group. It stimulated interest, creativity and entertainment during the summer tomato growing season and promoted U3A Port Fairy in the South West Region. An interview on ABC radio with our Vice President, Maggie Currie generated awareness of U3A Port Fairy as a strong volunteer organisation that enables older members of the community to learn, connect, actively participate, create and collaborate.

Planning for the Future of U3A Port Fairy

The information, advice and advocacy provided by our peak body, U3A Network Victoria has been invaluable as the Committee navigated the challenges of 2021. Network Council meetings as well as online forums, panels and information sessions conducted by U3A Network informed our planning, our marketing strategies, and course development, including the cultural awareness training and planning for the new The First Australians course. In addition the South West U3A network has provided opportunities for mutual support and sharing of information between U3A's in our region.

In October U3A Network Victoria assisted us in our preparations for the next phase of living with COVID-19. Recognising that U3A members are more vulnerable to the virus and that we have a collective responsibility to care for our community the Committee decided that all members of U3A Port Fairy would need to be double vaccinated to participate in courses in 2022. With the State government mandating double vaccinations for everyone entering community facilities, including Port Fairy Community House and other Moyne Council buildings, the Committee became responsible for ensuring our members adhered to this regulation. We updated our COVID-19 Safety policy and developed a *Terms and Conditions of Membership* document that has become an integral part of our membership process for 2022.

The Committee held an intensive Planning Workshop in October. It was valuable and timely to reflect on U3A Port Fairy's values and purposes, to review our organisational structure, to analyse membership data and the range of course offerings, and to define our vision and priorities for the next phase of U3A Port Fairy. We identified strengths, including the growth in our membership in the context of the pandemic, the spirit of volunteering reflected in the commitment of course leaders, the skills of the current Committee and other volunteers, our good reputation in the community and with the peak body, U3A Network.

We defined some long term and immediate risks and challenges and began work on addressing them.

1. Firstly, U3A Port Fairy is a growing and dynamic volunteer organisation in this community. Our model of lifelong learning, active participation and social inclusion provides tangible health benefits for our members. However, there is a need to increase our profile in the community and with all levels of government including Moyne Council. We plan to advocate for a positive ageing strategy for seniors in Moyne Shire.
2. Secondly, we have a strong relationship with Port Fairy Community House as our home base and the location for many of our classes. However as our membership grows, it is becoming more difficult to find suitable additional venues for our courses and the costs of hiring community facilities are rising. We plan to develop new partnerships with a range of community groups to increase our accommodation options and to purchase portable equipment so we will be less dependent on existing and inadequate technology for presentations in venues.
3. Thirdly, we recognise the importance of succession planning and supporting the workload of the Committee. All members of the Committee of Management from 2020 nominated again for their positions for 2021. This provided stability and continuity after the challenges of the past year. It is important, however, that the Committee is regularly renewed and we plan to recruit members with relevant skills to work on subcommittees so as to provide leadership transition and a pathway onto the Committee of Management.

In just three years we have developed an enthusiastic membership, a strong Committee of Management, an enthusiastic group of course leaders running a diversity of courses, and supportive relationships within the community and with other U3As in the Southwest region and in Melbourne. We have strategies for developing new community partnerships, raising the profile of U3A, increasing participation of members in governance and organisational tasks, and feel confident about the future of U3A Port Fairy as we move into 2022 and beyond.

Personally it has been rewarding to work closely with each Committee member throughout this challenging year and I have so appreciated their commitment to U3A Port Fairy, their skills, ideas, team-work and their friendship.



Dr Kate Donelan
President U3A Port Fairy
March 24 2022

