

## **Formby U3A Accessibility Policy**

### **1. Statement**

Formby U3A is a learning co-operative and membership charity which enables members in their third age to share educational, creative and leisure activities. Members of each U3A draw upon their knowledge, skills and experience to teach and learn from each other (peer to peer learning). Formby U3A is committed to ensuring that the U3A is as inclusive and accessible as possible for those in their third age who meet the criteria for membership. This policy document should be read alongside Formby U3A's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

### **2. Aims of the Policy**

This policy has been drawn up to ensure that Formby U3A takes steps to review accessibility needs for individual members and makes reasonable adjustments, where possible, to accommodate the needs of members with disabilities and/or health related needs. The policy takes into account the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010 and the need for Formby U3A to avoid discriminating directly or indirectly against members with disabilities and/or health related needs. The policy will act as a reference point for Committee Members, Group Leaders and individual members in terms of the steps Formby U3A will take. The policy will also identify the parameters of the adjustments that can be made. Formby U3A is a membership charity and not a service provider, therefore whilst reasonable adjustments will be made to ensure that individuals can participate and can attend with carers to support their needs, there will be certain needs that the U3A will not be able to accommodate due to the level of care that an individual may need.

### **3. Practical Approaches to Increasing Access**

In ensuring equality of access Formby U3A will take the following steps:

An Accessibility Officer will be identified from amongst the membership. This will be a volunteer role/committee member role.

The Accessibility Officer will have responsibility for liaising with Group Leaders on questions of accessibility.

The Accessibility Officer will contact new members who indicate that they have a disability or health related issue that may need additional support and/or adjustment and discuss with them what needs they have and how these could be met – as appropriate.

General meetings will, as far as possible, be held at a well lit, fully wheelchair accessible venue, spacious enough to cope with wheelchairs and mobility scooters, with wheelchair accessible toilet and hearing aid loop system, and with a sound system in use.

Speakers giving visual presentations will be asked to give a good description of the presentation if there is a possibility that people with visual impairment are present.

At the monthly members meetings the front row of seats will be reserved for members who have impaired hearing or vision.

Access will be reviewed by the committee on an ongoing basis with a view to considering any additional adjustments that may need to be made.

Group Leaders running groups that require a certain level of fitness and/or mobility will be asked to provide this information to members in advance so that members can decide as to whether the group is suitable for them.

Group Leaders will liaise with the Accessibility Officer where there are concerns about an individual's ability to participate.

Formby U3A will try to ensure that there are a range of groups available that will provide access to members so that members do not feel excluded from too many interest/activity groups.

Formby U3A will encourage and may require members to bring carers with them to U3A activities, as needed, with the carer not needing to pay a membership subscription. The carer will fall under U3A liability insurance unless they are a professional carer, in which case the individual will be covered by their employer's insurance cover. Other members should not attempt to act as carers as that situation not covered by U3A Insurance.

Formby U3A has a duty of care to all members and this may mean that difficult decisions have to be taken in assessing an individual's ability to participate either in the U3A as a whole or within individual activities. These decisions will always be taken through discussion with the individual member and his or her carer in order to ensure that a fair and considered decision is taken. This may include developing a risk assessment with the individual regarding their ability to participate.

Formby U3A will seek additional advice and support from U3A Plus, the Regional Trustee, National Office, the national website and external specialist organisations as required.

Detailed Guidance on dealing with specific accessibility issues are given in the Appendices

#### **4. Review**

Formby U3A will publish this policy on the Formby U3A website and draw it to the attention of Group Leaders.

Formby U3A Committee will review the operation of this policy annually.

Policy review date: May 2021

## **Appendix 1 Issues around Mobility**

### Mobility problems

- Diminished movement.
- Use of wheelchair, crutches, zimmer frame.
- Rheumatoid arthritis or similar.
- Transport to venues.
- Inability to leave home.

### Making open meetings accessible

- Review all venues re steps, ramps, handrails, toilets for the disabled, lifts, easy opening of doors.
- Ask members what help they require.
- Provide suitable space for wheelchairs at meetings and offer practical assistance.
- Encourage carers to accompany a member.
- Look at accessibility implications for parking at venues.
- Make it clear what to do in an emergency.
- Suggest car sharing.

### Making interest groups accessible

- Be flexible about meeting in members' homes, are they accessible?
- Could the disabled/impaired member host the group?
- Arrange meetings in retirement and/or care homes.

## **Appendix 2 Issues around Sight Loss**

### Sight loss

- Although some people are totally blind, or retain only light perception, a much greater number have varying degrees of useful residual vision.
- Some people have lost central vision while retaining peripheral vision, while for others it is the opposite; others may have "blotchy" or blurred vision.
- Some people will have good distance vision but poor close vision, e.g. for reading, while for others it will be the reverse.

### Making open meetings accessible

- Members with poor sight may prefer to sit nearer the front (see also notes on people with hearing impairment)
- Members with poor sight may well appreciate help in finding a seat, or locating someone they wish to sit next to, and may welcome assistance with getting a cup of tea or signing up for other activities.
- Speakers using Powerpoint or similar should be encouraged to talk through their slides.
- Members may not be able to read your name badge or instantly recognise your voice, so introduce yourself by "Hello, Fred here" or something similar.

- When guiding someone with sight loss, remember that they take your arm and follow you half a pace behind. Do not propel them forward into the unknown.
- Try to reduce glare by positioning chairs with their backs to windows.
- Produce all written information in accordance with clear print guidelines and make it available by email or text.

### Making interest groups accessible

The notes on meetings also apply to group activities and visits.

In addition:

- On a walk or ramble, different members of the group can assist by offering a guiding elbow, if required, and information on approaching features such as steps or overhanging branches.
- Cinema or theatre groups should consider timing their visits to coincide with audio described shows.
- Book groups should check whether the titles they select are available in a form which the member can read, preferably on loan or at a reasonable price.
- Playing cards are available with tactile or with enlarged visual markings.
- Many board games are available in an adjusted form.
- For physical activities such as Yoga or Pilates, the tutor should be encouraged to verbalise rather than just demonstrate.

## **Appendix 3 Issues around Hearing Loss**

### Hearing loss

- Moderate hearing loss is very common especially in the over 60s.
- It can destroy a sufferer's natural confidence and lead to isolation and depression.
- It can be compensated by hearing aids and other technical devices but most of all be sympathetic and knowledgeable support from peers.
- U3A activities are an ideal therapy for the social isolation which hearing loss can bring.

### Making open meetings accessible

- Provide a well installed induction loop and PA system.
- Check the equipment before the meeting.
- Use a room which is the right size for the numbers (not too big).
- Ensure that speakers understand the needs of members with hearing loss.
- Display important information on a screen or provide printed handouts.

### Making interest groups accessible

- The vital element is understanding and support from group leaders and members.
- Make sure hard of hearing members can explain their needs confident of the support of the group.

- Indoor discussion groups should use a room appropriate to the numbers and with good lighting.
- Technical aids such as induction loops and personal listeners can be useful but they should be tested first in a realistic situation before buying.
- U3As should share their experiences and successes in making their activity more accessible.

## **Appendix 4 Issues around Dementia**

### **Dementia**

Dementia describes different brain disorders that trigger a loss of brain function. These conditions are all usually progressive. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia, affecting 62 per cent 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, angry).
- Disorientation (confusion about time and place even in familiar surroundings).

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; the U3A can therefore make an important contribution to the individual's wellbeing.

Making your U3A dementia-friendly

The understanding and support of the broad membership of the U3A is needed to create a dementia-friendly environment.

### **Key Messages**

- Hope: people living with dementia can have a good quality of life, provided they remain involved in every-day life including going to their U3A.
- Dignity: Be aware that dementia does not equate with loss of intellect and everybody 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**

- A small amount of knowledge can enable a great amount of change.
- Think about the family members and carers and how you can support them.

- 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.
- Organise a Dementia Friends awareness session. More information is available on [dementiafriends.org.uk](http://dementiafriends.org.uk).

### **Members on their own**

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 the 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 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 along 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 to not speak at all, use clear and uncomplicated language.

### **Making Interest Groups accessible**

- Use people's names more than usual so 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.
- Occasionally 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.