

## **ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERS 2022/23**

The presentation of the Annual Report for the 2022/2023 is delivered with immense pride. We come together in Rockhampton to celebrate not only our achievements here in Queensland, but also 50 years of U3A and the enormous expansion of U3A worldwide.

As many of you know, I held the position of second Network President during 2012-2015. I pay tribute here to past presidents Julie Porteous and Gail Bonser and their committees who have worked tirelessly since 2015 to evolve our association into the strong and dynamic organisation that is U3A Network Qld Inc. in 2023. Of course, none of this would have occurred without the vision and foresight of the founding President Jim Hales, Vice President Dr. Rick Swindell AM and Secretary Dianne Delchau. They deserve and have our gratitude.

As I stepped into the Chair once again, I listened to the feedback and chatter from our members at the Presidents Council held at Pine Rivers and it became clear that Network needed to be more than a hard-working but remote group of people. To alleviate this concern, our Network team introduced the Liaison Person program, with members of the Network committee allocated several U3A groups to work closely with in a more personal way. This enables two-way communication to be effective and efficient and gives greater confidence for Presidents to contact Network. The feedback from U3As everywhere is that this program is a brilliant innovative idea and one that will connect our associations with Network on a whole new level.

Ever mindful of the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, and the goals outlined in that document, the incoming Network Committee organised themselves into three teams to reshape how we consolidate the progress achieved to date while looking to the future. The Teams concept provides the structure for small groups to complete bodies of work within their remit, without tying up all committee members on the same project.

- Team 1 Executive - Overall management/Advocacy/ Liaison Program
- Team 2 Marketing - Innovation/Communications/Publicity
- Team 3 Membership - Membership growth/Sustainability/Support

At the 2022 conference hosted by Pine Rivers, Network launched their new website, *u3aqlld.au*. This website was created by Network Vice President John Armstrong, and it brings Network well and truly into 2023 and beyond.

The website has proved to be a successful and valued digital asset that has enhanced communication with our U3A members and increased the profile of the Network in the eyes of our stakeholders.

The main benefits that have accrued include:

- A more interactive website that enables U3A members to find up-to-date and downloadable information on Network policies and procedural matters in a central place.
- A library of self-help resources to assist U3As in effective management of their U3A.
- Better communication and promotion of both the Network and U3A members, with latest news posts, branding guidelines and publication of member newsletters on the website.
- An email marketing platform that promotes U3A and Network activities by way of regular newsletters and other communiques that interact with the website.

A recent significant upgrade to the website is the inclusion of an event management system connected to an online registration and payment system for the Network State Conference in Rockhampton. This system can be used for future conferences and events, and for any other purpose requiring online payments. Development of the website is therefore ongoing with more enhancements envisaged.

As we slowly emerge from the effects and restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, which impacted every aspect of our lives, our members are once again keen to re-engage with their community. This has had a positive

outcome for our membership with most U3As reporting growth in January 2023.

Our Membership Team Leader, Larry Frazer, has been working with Cairns and Port Douglas and we are pleased to announce that U3A Port Douglas Shire will be the 36<sup>th</sup> Queensland U3A. Congratulations and welcome to Port Douglas. It is timely here to thank U3A Cairns for mentoring and supporting Port Douglas as they journeyed to autonomy.

Townsville hosted the Region Meeting for North and Far North Queensland in late August 2022. Beaudesert hosted the Region Meeting for Brisbane/Ipswich & Scenic Rim. Bundaberg hosted the first 2023 Region Meeting for Wide Bay & South Burnett. The benefits of these Region Meetings, which now include the Tutor Co-Ordinator's Forum as well as the Presidents Council, are gateways to building a stronger relationship between local U3As.

To coincide with the Region Meeting in Townsville, I embarked on a "Road Trip" around rural and regional Qld. This enabled me to hold meetings with Mayors, Councilors and Community Leaders in both Emerald and Charters Towers. These meetings were to discuss the possibility of a U3A being developed in those towns. They are both a work in progress.

Following on from the Region Meeting in Townsville, and in my role as 2023 conference mentor, I had meetings with the Rockhampton Conference Committee, the Rockhampton Mayor and Councilors, Advance Rockhampton and CQU Associate Vice President. In my role as Liaison Person, I held meetings with the Rockhampton Committee, Capricorn Coast Committee, and the Gladstone committee. A very productive "Road Trip" that proved invaluable for both Network and the committees visited.

The Network President continues to represent Queensland on the U3A Alliance Australia committee. I attended the meeting of the U3AAA held in conjunction with the Victorian Network State Conference hosted by U3A Bendigo. The U3AAA is in the process of finalising the transition to a Company Limited by Guarantee. This transition will give the U3AAA, hereafter to be known as U3A Australia, greater credibility with its stakeholders and will open doors to grants and other benefits previously denied us.

It has been my great honour to be a member of the AIUTA International Governing Board for the past two years. As the first Australian to be invited to this Governing Board I am pleased and proud that an Australian U3A has joined this worldwide organisation. The sharing of culture, language, traditions, and experiences all helps to foster a sense of belonging, contributes to our quality of life and helps us relate to each other on a much deeper level.

The relationship between COTAQ, nbn and Network has continued and several important webinars have been offered. The webinar *Your Digital Legacy* was attended by over 350 people; it was so popular that it was offered a second time to accommodate those who couldn't attend the first. Another 75 people participated in the second webinar.

Network has partnered with the nbn in the "Live Life Connected" program, to bring understanding of issues such as social isolation and loneliness in the community by promoting the benefits of home-based broadband, safe use of technology and improving digital skills. We are appreciative of the work undertaken by nbn in this program, at no cost to U3A.

Our committee has continued developing their relationship with Nancy Pachana, UQ Director, Healthy Ageing Initiative, Program Lead, UQ Age Friendly University & Healthy Ageing Initiatives. This association led to an invitation for me to meet, via skype, with Professor Dr. Mike Martin, Director Gerontology Centre and University Research Priority Program "Dynamics of Healthy Ageing", University of Zurich. Professor Martin is interested in how U3As operate in Australia which, as you know, is completely different to how U3As are managed in Europe. I have agreed to work further with Professor Martin.

Like community groups everywhere U3A committees are facing the common complaint of lack of people coming forward to volunteer. When and why did our Aussie spirit of volunteering disappear? How can we overcome this appalling lack of commitment? Many hours are spent around tables discussing how to attract, retain and appreciate volunteers. Unfortunately, no one seems to have a rock-solid solution. The Network committee is no different in its need for members to step up and continue the foundation work, locally and state wide, that will ensure our sustainability into the future.

At our Annual General Meeting the current Secretary Alison Taylor will complete her four-year term. On behalf of Network and our U3As around Queensland, I thank Alison for her involvement over the years. The Secretary's role is complex and time consuming and Alison has carried out her duties with enthusiasm and diligence and her contribution has been appreciated.

Treasurer Bronwyn Peddler is also stepping down and we thank Bronwyn for the years she has spent keeping our finances in order.

Last but not least we say goodbye from the committee to Margaret Cook. Margaret has served on the Network committee for four years in many roles, most recently as our Grants Officer. Margaret has helped keep Network aware of the different issues that face some of our smaller regional and rural U3As and her expertise will be missed.

A committee working as a team can achieve great things and I sincerely thank all of the team members for their contribution during the year. Vice President and webmaster John Armstrong has carried a heavier load than most and his contribution is acknowledged and appreciated.

The natural course of life is to participate in activities and interests that enable us to engage with our peers and this desire has been a contributing factor in the surge of new members and renewing members coming back into the community and through our doors in 2023.

Long may it continue.

*Rhonda Weston AM*

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