

In Conversation ... with Malcolm Clark, Chair, South Solihull U3A

Dave Pinwell finds out about activities for the retired

Malcolm Clark is retired from a long career with Marks and Spencer, managing stores in various parts of the country. He now commits his time to heading up this local branch of the charity 'for those who no longer work to come together and learn for fun'.

So, Malcolm, it is called South Solihull U3A and welcomes members from Knowle?

Actually a lot of the founding members were Knowle residents. Back in 2011, memberships at other local U3A branches were closed, so they decided to start a new one. We have since grown to 165 members, 70 from Knowle and others from across the M42.

And the U3A about learning in a fun way?

Learning new skills and opportunities for discovery through our wide range of activities. Whether it be our Walking group discovering new places, our Gardening group sharing tips and planting secrets, the Play Reading and Theatre groups going together to an RSC or Met Opera streaming at the cinema, our German and French Conversational groups honing their language use or folk gathering in our new Repair Shed to learn how to fix a chipped item or mend a broken appliance, we have so many ways to keep active and keep learning.

Keeping active - is fitness a part of U3A life?

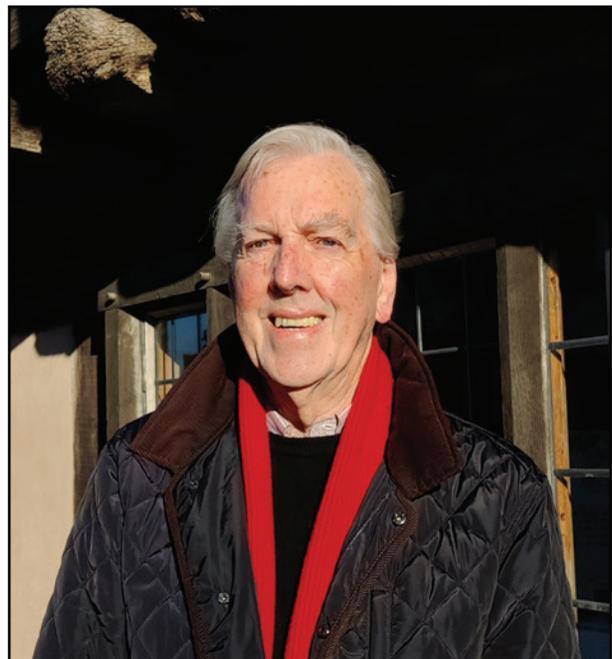
Keeping fit is important. A qualified, professional trainer leads our Keep Fit group. People are increasingly aware of the importance of wellness and being active in mind and body. Mind you, it is not too onerous, it is primarily sit down exercise!

And you believe that learning is important?

As long as it is enjoyable and rewarding. For me, learning and development are lifelong matters. I developed a passion for them during my career, especially when I was fortunate to enjoy a two year secondment working on linking schools to businesses across the West Midlands, working for one of HRH Prince Charles' charities. I also had a term as Chair of West Midlands Young Enterprise.

Do you have a base for your activities?

Yes, we meet at Bentley Heath Community Centre. We stage talks there, covering a variety of general topics, once a month for all members who want to come. Some group activities, such as the Keep Fit, also take place there. There are social activities as well, not least our Christmas Party.



However, our Art Appreciation group meets at the Royal British Legion in Knowle. They had an excellent talk there earlier this year from the team at Indigo Art Gallery.

Some smaller groups, though, can meet in members' homes and other activities are outdoors anyway. Our Repair Shed is kindly hosted by one of the enthusiastic and mechanically minded members in his large workshop at the end of his garden.

And I suppose there are also also organised trips?

Of course, for instance the History group visits museums and other places that take us back through time. We had an excellent trip to the Morgan factory in Malvern recently to watch cars being constructed using traditional methods. Our visit to the Acme Whistles factory in Birmingham was a revelation.

The Curry Club is another group that travels around. We have visited all the Indian restaurants in Knowle. In fact, we were at the Knowle Brasserie the evening of the Late Night Shopping in November. Knowle was busy that night!

If anyone reading this wants to know more, how do they get in touch?

The first port of call would be our Membership Secretary, Helen Clarke (helenclarke@hotmail.co.uk), or to visit our website (www.ssu3a.org). All new members are always most welcome.

Thank you for your time, Malcolm and best wishes to the U3A from Knowle Society