Malmesbury and District u3a

Support for Members with specific difficulties

General Principles

Malmesbury and District u3a in common with all other u3a groups, is a self-help, co-operative organisation run entirely by the members for the members, and built around active retirees. It is therefore important that individuals are able to take responsibility for their own participation in our interest groups and events.

In all our activities we will:

- Value, listen to and respect all members;
- Seek to ensure that all members feel welcomed, respected and safe;
- Recognise equality amongst all people, regardless of their background and current circumstance;
- Make reasonable adjustments that facilitate the inclusion of members living with particular difficulties.

Should the situation arise when someone can no longer participate without some form of help, we will make such reasonable modifications that we can to assist that member's participation.

Four Appendices briefly outline basic issues and reasonable adjustments that Group Leaders and event organisers are encouraged to make for those facing challenges common in the third-age:

Appendix 1 ~ Immobility

Appendix 2 ~ Loss of Hearing

Appendix 3 ~ Loss of Vision

Appendix 4 ~ Cognitive Disorder

More extensive advice is available from the sources cited and, where relevant to a particular group member, should be followed as far as is practical. In most cases, members are well informed about their condition; those requiring any adjustments should ensure that group leaders and/or groups are aware of their personal limitations or needs so reasonable provision for their participation may be made.

In all cases, it is the individual member's responsibility (or that of the carer) to arrange arrival and departure to and from the activity's meeting point at the times advertised.

Companions and Carers

Much as we wish to be inclusive (as we progress through our third age, any one of us may need support of this kind) there may still be practical limits to what we can offer. Our volunteer organisers cannot be expected to take formal responsibilities for other members. However, the participation of the member may still be possible if they are accompanied throughout by a designated companion/carer who is well known to the member concerned and able to deal with any problems that might arise. We cannot provide such specialist support as carers or signers though we will endeavour to accommodate the person providing it to a member in need.

The companion/carer need not be a member of the M&D u3a, nor of the third-age, unless they are taking part in the group activities themselves, rather than just accompanying the member who is taking part. They will only be charged for the direct expenses of the activity levied by other parties (e.g. for travel, catering or an entrance ticket). Crucially, they will be covered by the liability insurance provided by The Third Age Trust whilst in attendance, unless the carer is a paid professional who must be covered by appropriate public liability insurance of their own.

Although other members may be kindly willing to help on a limited or casual basis, M&D u3a cannot allow

them to take full or formal responsibility for other members' care and safety; this is likely to be deemed outside The Third Age Trust's insurance cover should any injury or damage result. Further, should we judge the risk of mishap to be unacceptable, we reserve the right to insist that a designated companion/carer accompanies the member concerned throughout an activity, not least in that member's own interest.

All M&D u3a members are expected to be mindful of this policy and ensure that they do not make commitments beyond its scope. Any initial enquiries from potential members, communications with, or developing concerns about current members that are relevant to this issue should be drawn to the attention of the Groups Co-ordinator.

Decision Process

The nature and degree of the problems challenging members with specific difficulties will be different in each case. Similarly, the degree of hazard involved in different M&D u3a interest groups and activities. It is therefore not possible to anticipate all eventualities.

Any member or Group Leader concerned with any aspect of M&D u3a practice or interpretation of this policy should first discuss the issue with the Groups Co-coordinator who will endeavour to resolve the problem informally, balancing the inclusive aspirations of M&D u3a and the needs of the member concerned against the demands upon our volunteer organisers and the interests of other members committed to the activity.

Should such a resolution not prove possible, then the matter may be referred, by any party involved, for confidential investigation and decision by an Executive sub-Committee of three persons drawn from the Chair, Vice-Chair, Business Secretary, Treasurer and Groups Co-ordinator. The decision of that Executive sub-Committee will be final.

APPENDIX 1 ~ IMMOBILITY

Our main meetings take place in public spaces such as Malmesbury Town Hall, Riverside Community Centre and Burnham Court Residential Home that offer car-parking facilities and full disabled access, including lifts. Each has defined emergency evacuation procedures that provide for the immobile. Those booking other public venues should ensure they are suitable for any member of the group (or potential member) living with mobility issues.

A good number of groups meet in members' private houses. Some will have the essentials for a disabled person's participation – step-free access, wide doorways, and a ground floor toilet – but many will not. Check! Perhaps the disabled member could host the group?

APPENDIX 2 ~ LOSS OF HEARING

Again, our main meetings are held in venues with loop systems for use by those with hearing aids. In private houses, group members need to speak clearly and distinctly and maybe slightly slower than normal. (Beware of patronising, overly slow diction, exaggerated mouth movements or shouting.)

Seating positions may be important, particularly if the member's difficulty is more pronounced in one ear. So may the lighting if the member needs to lip-read.

APPENDIX 3 ~ LOSS OF VISION

Minor adjustments are obvious, such as reserving seating close to a visual display, reducing glare from windows or other lights, printing handouts in a larger font size.

Others rather less so. For example: light letters on a dark background are easier to read than dark on light; use either a standard Roman or Sans Serif font such as Arial; use bold type but avoid italics and paper with a glossy finish.

APPENDIX 4 ~ COGNITIVE DISORDER

Advice for those dealing with a Member living with dementia is available from the national Third Age Trust website. More extensive and detailed advice can be found on Age UK's website.

Some degree of cognitive decline is, unfortunately, a frequent feature of the ageing process and can be unsettling.

Dementia is more serious and a blanket term for many different forms of brain disease (of which Alzheimer's is the most common) that are distressing and even frightening. Initially the symptoms are mild but they worsen significantly over time. Those living with dementia often have difficulty not just with memory but also with everyday tasks, perception and communication. They are much less likely than those with physical issues to be able to articulate their needs – but as likely to feel the frustration of their predicament. However, brain diseases affect everyone in different ways and no two people with dementia will have the exact same symptoms.

M&D U3A aspires to support members living with dementia by enabling them to remain participants in our activities for as long as is possible and practical, and with a designated companion/carer where necessary.

We will endeavour to be positive, to treat those living with the disorder as adults and encourage them to do what they can for themselves.

Further, the Committee will, from time to time, organise Awareness Training for its own members, Group Leaders and any other interested u3a members to ensure we all remain well informed.

As every case is different, Group Leaders and other volunteer organisers must make judgements in the circumstance that apply; any concerns should be discussed with the member's carer and the Groups Co-ordinator in accordance with the General Principles above.