What sort of activities does Flintshire U3A put on for its members?

We have over 750 members and offer over 80 wide ranging interest groups, including walking, sports and games, natural history and science, social history, singing and music groups. There are language groups, art & craft groups, philosophy, reading and poetry groups. We even have an iPad user and a drumming group. We run lectures on a variety of topics and also organise social events, days out and short breaks away.

All the groups are run by Flintshire U3A members on a voluntary basis. Sometimes people get put off by the ‘University’ bit of the name, but it’s not like school at all. We don’t have any tests or exams and it’s great fun! You’re never too old to learn, and it’s not just for people with qualifications - anyone can get involved. It’s all about coming together and learning from each other.

If someone’s interested in an activity that we don’t currently offer, if they let us know, we look into how we might be able to make it happen. We’ll try anything!
What do you get out of being involved?

It's a great way of making new friends. We've built up such good friendships through the U3A. Every group you get involved with, you get to meet new people, and we always have a laugh.

Being a member gives you confidence, which can lead to you getting involved in more things and with other groups. A lot of our members volunteer with other local organisations and charities. We ran a session about dementia and memory loss, and as a result of that, one of us now volunteers at a local care home, helping to put on activities for people with dementia.

Being involved gives you the freedom to be yourself and to express yourself, and to continue to learn. It's a chance to discover more about yourself. We have people who have worked all their lives in science and have now discovered a love of art for the first time. You're never too old to learn, and once you start it's infectious. Just as important as learning new things is that the groups give us the opportunity to use the skills we've developed throughout our lives and careers.

We have a great mix of ages taking part in the groups, spanning three generations. People with such different life experiences come together through U3A. Everyone you talk to has a different story. People know so much more than they think they do.
What do you think you’d be doing with your time if it wasn’t for U3A?

I don’t know where else people go. If this wasn’t available, we’d have to go and start it ourselves!

You have so many members and so many activities – what challenges do you face?

One of the biggest challenges is for people who don’t drive and who can’t get to groups. It can be difficult for people with disabilities or mobility issues. It’s a shame that they might not be able to stay involved in groups which are important to them.

Sometimes another member can give them a lift. It’s really important, if you can, to help someone else get to activities which they might not otherwise be able to.
Do you have any tips for helping people to get involved with community groups?

Just do it. Find a friend to go along with you for the first time. Get involved with something that you are comfortable with, and build up confidence from there.

When you retire, it can feel as though you lose your identity and that you become invisible. It’s important to make plans, and planning for your social life in retirement is as important as your pension. Whatever your age, we all need things to keep our minds as well as our bodies active.

Just because of retirement, you don’t have to stop living and enjoying life, whatever your age is. Age is just a number.

Any tips for groups on how to make new people feel welcome?

It’s a big step for someone to get involved in a group for the first time. For some people this might be the first time they’ve got involved in any social activity since a big change in their lives such as a bereavement or retirement.

We have ‘welcomers’ at our meetings, who have a chat to anyone new, and make sure that they feel at ease and know that they’re not on their own. We also run free taster sessions to get people involved, and organise coffee mornings for new members so everyone can get to know each other.

For more information about Flintshire U3A, visit www.flintshire-u3a.co.uk or phone 01244 550 381.

To find out about U3A groups in your area, visit www.u3a.org.uk or phone 020 8466 6139.