

Have Your Say!

MEMBERS' FEEDBACK SURVEY – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In December 2018, U3A Croydon's Members' Feedback Survey was emailed to 626 members and mailed to 154 members without email addresses. Over 40% of people who received the survey completed it - a great response rate. Thank you to all who participated.

Below is a summary of the findings from the survey. There are also quotes from the respondents who made comments on the survey. The full report can be downloaded from our website.

Many people asked questions about different things. We will publish responses to your questions in upcoming newsletters. Suggestions and complaints have been forwarded to the Committee for follow up and action where necessary.

The respondents

Around eight out of ten (80%) respondents were female and two out of ten (20%) were male. It is likely that a third of U3A Croydon members live alone.

Nearly six out of ten respondents have been members of U3A Croydon for five years or less, over four out of ten have been members for five years or over. Many respondents over 81 years of age have been members for ten years or more!

The findings

The findings from the survey show that U3A Croydon is a valued community organisation for Maroondah's seniors population, keeping them physically and mentally active and socially connected, and reducing the social isolation some may otherwise experience.

Over nine out of ten members (93%) indicated they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their membership at U3A Croydon. Less than one in ten (nearly 7%) had mixed feelings or were 'dissatisfied'. None were 'very dissatisfied'.

Exercise type classes were the most popular despite social benefits being most commonly reported. Members appreciated the affordability and broad range of courses and activities offered. Their choices changed as they aged to adapt to changing interests and abilities. Many would prefer computer/tech classes where they could bring their own devices.

Nearly nine out of ten respondents said they had gained social benefits from their participation at U3A Croydon, nearly seven in ten reported mental benefits, over five in ten physical benefits and over four in ten reported emotional benefits.

Here's what respondents had to say:

The organisation

'Just to say a huge thank you to all the volunteers who do a tremendous job. Croydon U3A is a well organised, and friendly organisation that offers a great range of activities, and we are most appreciative of their efforts.'

'It's terrific. Affordable, educational, good fun and the best social network out there. Thank you for all the hard work it takes to keep it going.'

The courses

'Your courses have given me, company and interests, physical, and mental stimulation, opportunity and enjoyment in things I like to do.'

'The range of courses offered is varied and extensive – and such a reasonable price!'

The tutors and volunteers

There were many words of thanks for the tutors, the volunteers, and the Committee for their hard work and commitment to keep the organisation running. Members particularly valued the contribution of the tutors for sharing their knowledge and skills with their students.

'Thanks to all the wonderful tutors who give us their time week after week. And for their friendship.'

'Having your wonderful tutors, who teach voluntarily, passing on their skills to us, their students, is a commendable achievement, I thank them, and you the organisers for that.'

'I appreciate the feeling given by the tutors that I matter, that I count in the class, I belong!'

'Keep up the good work, we need each other.'

Criticisms

Some members complained about what they saw as a 'rigid' management style and a 'less friendly' organisation, others were critical of administrative processes or other decisions made by the Committee or office staff. But criticisms like these were few.

Most of the critical comments were about venues. There were comments about the lack of a 'home' for U3A Croydon' and others described the old, dirty and poorly maintained buildings, unsuitable classroom space, and the lack of up to date classrooms and facilities.

'It would be great to have our own building to call home like so many other [U3As].'

'Just please give teachers a proper venue to teach their classes. Some that we use now are not suitable at all.'

Benefits

The social, mental and physical benefits of participating in courses and activities at U3A Croydon were important to many members. The social benefits were most important to members, particularly as their lifestyle changes and they transition from work to retirement, when they or their partner face an illness or injury, or must adjust to other major events in their lives. Other benefits, such as mental stimulation and physical were also important.

Research shows that these benefits keep older people healthy, active and engaged as they age which help reduce social isolation. The findings from the survey are evidence that U3A Croydon is an important local organisation that contributes significantly to the government's goals of active and healthy ageing for Maroondah's older citizens.

Social benefits

Many members have relied on their membership at U3A Croydon to build a new social circle as their lifestyle changes. They value the new friendships they have made as they have aged. They form enduring support networks and describe feeling connected to the U3A and Croydon community.

Connection to community:

'[I have] a wonderful sense of belonging to the U3A community.'

'As a single person, U3A has helped me greatly in engaging socially with others and in providing mentally engaging activities in my local area.'

'The craft classes are needed for the social companionship of the elderly who cannot participate in a lot of the other courses. Without these classes they would be lonely and easily depressed.'

'All activities have a major benefit of keeping our age group connected to society.'

Making new friends:

I have made wonderful friends and being a member has broadened my outlook.

'My partner has learned to dance which enhances our social life.'

'I enjoy the social interaction with some great people. In the courses I attend, I find that the participants look out for each other. They care about others.'

'I believe U3A is a great organisation. I have made some great friends. Now I am older things change. Bushwalking and exercise classes held me in good stead. Now I hope to continue with [tai chi] exercise.'

'I have met such a wide variety of people with such interesting life stories and I now know that age is only a number!'

After retirement:

'When I retired from full-time work I had no friends in the local area. U3A has brought me in contact with so many people from Croydon and the surrounding region, that now I have formed friendships with, that I feel blessed.'

'It is good meeting new people in similar circumstances to you and your situation and understanding the difference between now and when you were in the work environment.'

'You saved my life after retirement! I get up each day and look forward to study and participating in the courses you offer. Thanks heaps!'

Adjustment to new circumstances:

'I have just returned to the area after a long 'tree change' and have found myself a little lost on my return. Just enrolling for courses next year has improved my outlook.'

'Very happy with the help and emotional support supplied to my friends who lost their partners from people who are at U3A.'

'Fantastic organisation, great people. Joining U3A for me was a lifestyle change.'

Feeling valued and making a contribution:

'Met lots of folk. Knowing what I do is appreciated. Reinforcement that retired people can still contribute and learn. Positive experience.'

'I had a long illness and was lonely for years. Now, I tutor two courses and have a network of friends to share other activities with. Love U3A. Thank you.'

'Sharing my knowledge and getting their input with other like-minded people.'

The mental benefits

A number of members mentioned the benefits to remaining mentally stimulated, not just to keep their mind active, but to give their life meaning through continually learning and expanding their perspective:

'Participating and hearing and learning more about people gives life a true meaning.'

'A joy to be in company interested in many and varied matters. Enthusiasm need not dissipate with age!'

'Every week brings new ideas, challenges my prejudices and expands my mind.'

The physical benefits

Fewer people mentioned the physical benefits of being a member of U3A Croydon. Even for those who did, they were often mentioned in the context of broader social benefits:

'As physical wellness changes you can change your classes of interest to accommodate this.'

'These activities really contribute to my health and happiness by giving me social outlets with people who have similar interests.'

'I feel if it wasn't for being a member of U3A for 22 years, I wouldn't be as happy and healthy as I am today. Thank you.'

And finally:

'I hope to keep attending for many years to come!'