

Knutsford U3A Guidance for Group Leaders and Organisers of Outings concerning Members with Disabilities

Knutsford U3A aims to be as inclusive as possible, both to our members and to third agers who wish to join our organisation, and to provide access to our activities as far as reasonably possible. These guidance notes have been developed in line with advice from the Third Age Trust alongside our Accessibility Policy and the Guidance for Members with Disabilities.

Not all members with disabilities will require reasonable adjustments in order to access our activities. This guidance covers members who have disabilities and do require reasonable adjustments in order to access our activities. They may have physical disabilities, visual or hearing loss, or be developing dementia to name but a few. There are many things that may affect a member's ability to attend our activities but many of these can be overcome by reasonable adjustments.

There may be some things that members can do to help. For example: if a person has a hearing disability they can face the person when they are speaking.

If you have any concerns, you can always contact the Accessibility Officer.

Carers and Companions

Knutsford u3a is a self-help organisation and does not provide care or carers for members attending our activities.

If a member is unable to manage activities without help they are welcome to bring a carer to stay with them for the duration of the activity.

Where a member has mobility issues, the carer or companion should be able to assist the person completely and not rely on the goodwill of other members to assist their carer or companion.

The carer/companion like all our members will be covered by our u3a public liability insurance, unless they are a professional carer.

The carer or companion does not need to be a member of the u3a and may attend any activity group with the person they are caring for at no extra cost. This is on the understanding that they will continue to provide care for the member while they are present.

Where a carer or companion accompanies a member on an outing, the member must pay their cost for the outing as well as that for themselves. Many venues do not charge for carers or companions when they are accompanying a person with a disability such as significant visual or hearing impairment. If the venue does not charge for the carer you should only ask the member to pay for the carer's transport.

Monthly Members Meetings

We do our best to carry out most of our activities, as far as possible, in venues that are accessible. Our monthly Members Meetings are held in Knutsford Methodist Church, which is fully accessible to members with mobility issues, including those who may use wheelchairs or mobility scooters. There is an accessible toilet, and a lift for access to upstairs rooms that are used by some Activity Groups. It has a hearing loop system and good lighting. Information is shown projected on to the wall, and verbal announcements are made using a microphone which connects to the hearing loop system. Members are welcome to sit in the front rows if that helps them to see and hear well.

If a member requires reasonable adjustments to help them participate fully in the meetings we have asked them to contact the Accessibility Officer in advance to discuss these.

Activity Groups

Many of these are held in fully accessible public rooms. However, you may hold your Activity Group in members' own homes, where full accessibility may be a problem. We advise members with disabilities to contact the Group Leader and the Accessibility Officer to discuss their needs to see if the venue is suitable. If a member with particular needs cannot attend a group of their choice because of the venue, the Accessibility Officer and Group Leader can explore other options with them.

This could include the possibility of the group meeting at a more accessible venue, (possibly the new member's home), the member setting up another group at a more accessible venue, or the member could consider joining a group in a neighbouring U3A if their venue is more suitable. If it is the activity that is not accessible to the member and not the venue the member could discuss with the Groups Co-ordinator the option of setting up another group which is more suitable for them.

On Outings

If you are the Organiser of an outing you should research accessibility as far as reasonably possible in advance of any trip, and inform members of likely difficulties. You will not be expected to make any guarantee of accessibility. Any member who needs help is welcome to bring a carer with them and this is covered in the section above on carers.

Should Difficulties Arise

Our aim is to be welcoming and inclusive to all members, and to make reasonable adjustments to the way we operate to accommodate the needs of members with a range of disabilities.

However, we do not provide care for individual members.

Where a member does not have a carer and relies on the goodwill of other members to assist them in accessing premises or activities, without agreeing this in advance with the members, the Group Leader or Organiser must decide whether this is reasonable or if they need to take action, for example: to prevent a member from sustaining an injury.

Likewise if a situation arises where a carer is unable to fully assist the person and relies on the good will of other members to assist them, the Group Leader or Organiser must decide whether this is reasonable or if they need to take action for example: to prevent a member from sustaining injury.

If you reach a stage where a particular member's participation in a group is having a negative effect on the whole group, you as Group Leader or Organiser should take action. You should begin by raising concerns with the Accessibility Officer.

Options may include you or the Accessibility Officer discussing this with the member to see if there is a way around the situation.

You should only speak to a family member or another person responsible for the member if the member is unable to manage their own affairs or if they give their consent.

The advice from the Third Age Trust is that u3as should not take responsibility for the care of an individual member with disabilities, and that when making adjustments, their needs should not override the successful running of the group.

In these circumstances it is unlikely that we would be considered to be acting in a discriminatory way by asking a member to leave a group, or even the u3a. Before considering this the Group Leader must discuss the circumstances with the Accessibility Officer and only act with their agreement.

Knutsford u3a practical advice for Group Leaders and Organisers on ways that you can help members with visual and hearing loss

Members with visual loss

There are some practical tips that may be helpful to members with vision loss, but most members with vision loss will know the things that are helpful to them. We can suggest taking seats close to the front of any meetings and reducing glare from lighting or windows. If members let the Group Leader, Organiser or Speaker know in advance, then specific arrangements may be able to be made.

There are ways of making printed information more accessible, by using type size 14 or larger, using a clear font for everyone such as Arial or Verdana, avoiding italics and decorative fonts. It's best to have a good contrast between the text and the background, such as black on white or dark blue on cream, and avoiding coloured lettering and glossy finishes. Some members may have their own technology aides.

Members with hearing loss

Hearing loss can be difficult for members to admit to, so sensitivity is needed. All of us lose hearing quite significantly with age, so the level of hearing in any of our groups will be variable. The monthly Members Meeting held in the Methodist Church is equipped with hearing loops, and we have a portable microphone that can be borrowed. We can try to reduce external noise as far as possible, and encourage those who have hearing loss to sit where it would help them most. At group meetings you should ask group members to take turns in speaking, so they can be heard more clearly, and having pen and paper to hand may be useful. Some written notes might be helpful in some circumstances.

To communicate well with someone with a hearing loss, say the person's name before beginning a conversation, and ask if they have better hearing in one ear, then be in the best place for the person. Speak clearly without shouting or exaggerating mouth movements, speaking at normal speed or slightly slower, pausing between sentences. Use plain language and avoid long sentences.

If you know that someone is lip reading, face them and get their attention before speaking. Keep your hands away from your face while talking. Try to avoid lighting which is too low, or shines into the person's eyes. Having the room set out horseshoe style is better than rows of chairs. Consider using a microphone, but try not to obscure your face with it.