

Setting Up Coffee & Chat

This is an informal "drop-in" activity provided as a service to members. However, it has several valuable "spin-offs" - more about these later.



Members are *not* required to enrol for *Coffee & Chat* as they are for regular courses, although it is advertised in the programme. However, for insurance purposes a record should be kept of those attending each session.

Coffee & Chat operates on the morning of pension day -that is, every second Thursday. Of course it could be conducted at another time, but the rationale for the adoption of this time-slot is that many members come to town on that day and appreciate having somewhere to call in and have a cuppa (tea or coffee), a biscuit and a chat with U3A friends. (*Hint: keep it to a biscuit, you don't want to get into anything more elaborate in the area of catering because you don't know how many will turn up on any day.*) A small charge, 20 cents, is made for this. It is strongly recommended that it be minimal. and that the cost of hiring a venue not be factored in.

It is a distinct advantage to have a venue close to the town centre, ideally within easy walking distance of post office, bank, shopping centre, doctor's surgery, chemist etc. You will also need access to the means of making that cuppa and washing up afterwards.

The session lasts for two hours, from 10am to 12 noon. Members of the Management Committee, together with other member volunteers (the more the better) work on a roster system. Two are on duty each session to ensure there's a supply of tea, coffee & biscuits, to set up the room and generally oversee proceedings. (Don't forget that attendance book!)

You will need to have someone to act as coordinator of the activity. He/she is helped by a group of "talent scouts" who are always on the lookout for potential speakers. This is where we come to those valuable "spin-offs" mentioned earlier.

About half way through the session there is a short talk - no longer than 20 minutes. The aim is to draw these talkers from the membership. Over several years an incredible and varied range of topics have been addressed, far too numerous to list here. There is an amazing depth of expertise, interests and experience to be found within your own membership. Believe me!

Here we find the first of those spin-offs. *You are identifying prospective course leaders!* Those hesitant

about (terrified of?) presenting a regular session can often be persuaded to talk informally to a group of friends. In doing so quite a few will find - perhaps to their surprise - that they really *can* "do it" and are ready to take the next step and present a regular session - or two.

Of course there are occasionally those non-U3A sources you might like to draw on - the next door neighbour with a fascinating hobby or who has just returned from trekking in Nepal; the local solicitor who might speak about making a will or setting up an enduring guardianship; the local vet who talks about training your dog; a granddaughter/grandson who will explain the mysteries of the mobile phone; the lady next door who owns and operates a spinning wheel etc. etc. In fact, encourage the coffee & chatters themselves to keep their eyes (and ears) open for new talent.

Here we come to another spin-off. *Coffee & Chat* is a warm, relaxed and effective way of integrating new members. Have the enrolment officer suggest to new members that they go along to *Coffee & Chat* and then alert the *Coffee & Chat* coordinator. Make sure that the volunteers on duty each week have the names of new members so they can check the attendance sheet and make sure that any "newie" is made welcome and introduced around.

The third spin-off is especially valuable for larger U3As. It gives members an opportunity to get to meet and chat with members other than those they meet in classes in their own interest areas. It's easy to get "lost" in a large U3A!

It has been found that it doesn't take long for members to take ownership of this activity and accept responsibility for the "housekeeping" - washing up, replacing furniture and generally tidying-up at the end of the session.

Conclusion

U3A is all about the provision of learning opportunities in a friendly, supportive social environment.
Coffee & Chat provides just this.

For more information please don't hesitate to contact

Mel Davies

31/154 Brighton Avenue,

Toronto NSW 2283

Phone: (02) 4959 2867

Email: mel.d@westnet.com.au