

u3a in a spin – what next? An article by Janet Garland

Ilkley & District u3a has made an exciting start to the year with a ground-breaking partnership scheme to benefit members' physical health and wellbeing. This cooperation with one of the jewels of the locality, Ilkley Tennis Club, could lead to similar arrangements over the whole country. Early results for these pioneering arrangements are looking extremely positive,

U3A trustee Peter Mate is well known for his tireless energy in getting things done in the town as a local councillor and for the Ilkley and District u3a. He participates in u3a activities, plays with a rock band, (of course), he is also a member of the tennis club and served on committees there.



Peter came up with an idea to benefit both u3a members and the tennis club; u3a members could use the club's downtime at certain parts of the day and week to improve their health and wellbeing by attending tailor-made activities. The club would benefit from extra income when its facilities were underutilised.

This is exactly what has happened.

The idea was put to both parties. ITC decided to offer certain days and times, with specially planned sessions. These would take place under the eye of their fitness professionals in studios at particular downtime in the

day and week, with tailored activities. The whole exercise would be organised and the admin coordinated for u3a by trustee Neil Stevens, the second vital part of the deal.

The result was the setting up of u3a Fitness Hub after consultation with ITC club, deciding to offer u3a carefully chosen activities. To start with, three different Pilates groups, a Silver Spin studio session and a Move Freely hour were suggested, appealing to different interests and levels of fitness, initially for 10 weeks, the regime constructed by Marcus Head of gym, Freia supervising MF and Pilates, and Gareth Silver Spin.

The result was astonishing

Messages went out on the u3a noticeboards and signing day saw lines of interested participants arriving at the Tennis Club, many of them for the first time, choosing which taster activities they wanted to try. Some people signed up and paid for several; 75 people enjoyed nibbles and drinks while they queued, and queue they did,

Neil Stevens, longstanding active u3a trustee and former board member of the national organisation - headed up organising and supervising the system. In the event he found himself signing up a much greater number of people than expected on registration day, equipped with card machines and helpers

explaining how sessions worked, arranging for the fee (£24) to be taken and processed, an active role on the day and since. He and his wife joined classes and Neil has even been seen taking the register at some sessions.

It is early days, but the classes are full. A quick poll of participants for this article revealed huge satisfaction. Pilates is a particular area where there are bound to be many different levels of fitness and experience. Some had done it before and said it was rather simple. Others said it was invigorating, a real challenge which they looked forward to. Another suggested there were too many groups with different capabilities. This will sort itself out as things go on, but all said they liked it better each session, as they are varied and the leader responsive to the opinions of the participants.

Spin, high-level, high-speed cycling was by its nature chosen by people who were fitter and perhaps younger than others. One person interviewed said that she would have preferred a session which did not have 'pop music' but was ridiculed by her daughter, approaching her 60s, who told her that was the way it was done these days, much to her amusement. Music sets the pace and tv screens give cues for hills or flat cycling.



Moving freely is attended by the writer. Leader Freia keeps on board people who could do 10K before lunch, others who have had hip replacements, all keen to recover equilibrium and challenge their bodies with bending, moving and balancing, feeling they are improving each session.

ITC, it's reported, are delighted. Going forward, other areas are possible- Paddle tennis, extra table tennis perhaps, after member consultation. Many see the template for this initiative has relevance across u3a.

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This article will appear in an abbreviated form in the next edition of the EYE