

**W**e are almost two thirds of the way through our first year and there is no doubt that U3A Riverland has been highly successful. Just ask anyone who has participated in an activity and they'll tell you how much they've enjoyed learning something new as well as the social interaction.

Perhaps, after you have read this month's article "Fighting Memory Loss", you'll rush out and join the art class ... no nude male model that I'm aware of ... well, not yet! The art class has been very popular and tutor, Daina Braddock, has encouraged the groups to display their artistic works in an upcoming exhibition.

A lot has happened since our last newsletter and we now have 137 members. I, like many of you, left the winter behind and travelled for several months. Geoff and I survived another 800km pilgrimage, this time across southern France. I found the mountainous terrain very challenging especially as we experienced unseasonal high temperatures for early June. We often walked in 30+ degrees—very energy sapping. If you would like to hear about this or any other travel tales our members have to share, attend one of the Armchair Travel sessions. Thanks to organisers Richard and Maureen, this will likely be a monthly program held in the Barmera library. Let us know if you have a travel story you would like to share or if you know of someone we could encourage to share their travel experiences.

Thank you to all the new tutors who have begun a course. From the list of activities available, I'm sure there is something that you may be interested in and if not please let us know what it is that you would like to either learn or participate in.

*Diana March* (Editor)

## MOOCS

*(No, it's not something cows do!)*

MOOCS (Massive Open Online Courses) are FREE from the world's best universities and training organisations. This is a wonderful way of learning something new through video lectures and interactive learning communities. What's more you can do it in the privacy and comfort of your own home. Areas of study are diverse and include science and technology, health and medicine, business and finance, arts and humanities, education and training.

An Australian based MOOC, which attracts students globally, is **Open2Study** - [www.open2study.com](http://www.open2study.com). One course that may assist U3A members interested in leading a group, is "**Becoming a Confident Trainer**" - a series of videos that help to develop an understanding of adult learners and what motivates them to learn. Check it out or just Google MOOCS to find out more about this new-age way of learning



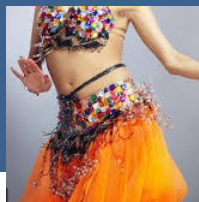
U3A members learn a trick or two at the "**Magic to Amuse Kids**" day. Tutor, James Young, will run another course in October. Check for details on the website's "Activities" page or contact James on 8583 0118

### BELLY DANCING—Nerida Stanton

The art of Belly Dancing has its origins in the Middle East. It's a wonderful form of exercise, massaging all the internal organs while toning the body

In general, it's a fun, liberating, sensual way to exercise ... followed by coffee (of course)! It can be quite challenging to get the "belly rolls" going, but not too many or else you may think you've overdosed on Nanna's laxettes. "Shimmies", "hip rolls" and "figure 8's" are all part and parcel of a class.

Nerida conducted a 6-week class which began on August 4.



### HAT MAKING FUN—Lorraine Marter

We are thrilled that Lorraine will run a workshop in time for the Melbourne Cup luncheons.

Lorraine is well known for her wearable art creations "You-nique." Often made of recycled fabrics these garments are one-only creations. See her unique work in Lorraine's Gallery on her website [www.marterdomgallery.com](http://www.marterdomgallery.com)

This course has a strictly limited number and will be run as a 1-day workshop in the September school holidays. Register your interest by phoning 85864445 or 0419808454

Further details are available on the "Activities" page of our U3A website.





**W**e'd all like to about keep our brains as sharp as possible as we age. But what are the best ways to do this, asks Michael Mosley.

Ask anyone over the age of 40 what worries them most about growing older and the answer that comes back is almost always **the fear of losing your memory**. I worry about the fact that I find it harder than ever to remember names and that without my phone to remind me, I would forget many of my daily appointments.

There are some fairly obvious **things to avoid** if you want to maintain good brain health. These include smoking, becoming overweight and developing Type 2 diabetes. But what can you positively do to **enhance your brain?**

With the help of Newcastle University we recruited 30 volunteers to find out. Before we began our experiment all our volunteers were subjected to a barrage of tests that measured things like memory, ability to problem solve and general psychomotor speed (reaction times).

Everyone was then fitted with an activity monitor to measure how much and when they were moving. The volunteers were then randomly allocated to three groups and asked to do a particular activity for the next eight weeks.

**Group 1:** we simply asked them to walk briskly, so that they were just out of breath, for 3 hours a week. Walking - in fact any form of vigorous exercise - will keep your brain fed with lots of oxygen-rich blood.



**Group 2:** were asked to do puzzles, such as crosswords or Sudoku for 3 hours each week. The reasoning is that your brain, like a muscle, benefits from being challenged. Use it or lose it.



**Group 3:** were asked to stare at a naked man for 3 hours a week. Or, to be more accurate, they were asked to take part in an art class which also happened to involve drawing a naked man.



**THE RESULTS**

By the end of our 8-week trial almost everyone in the walking group noticed a big improvement in their general health - how much easier they managed a particular hill. Some of the puzzler group had found the puzzles hard at first, but by the end of the eight weeks many were hooked and swapping Sudoku tips.

The most enthusiastic group, however, was undoubtedly the art class. Although a few found attending a class once a week daunting, all of them commented on how much they enjoyed it.

"I have become a compulsive drawer of everything," says Simone. "I have been out to buy myself some pastel pencils and even a book on 'How to'. So, art equals pleasure, but which group enjoyed the greatest improvements in brain power?"

Our scientists redid their battery of cognitive tests and the results were clear-cut. All the groups had got a bit better, but the stand-out group was those who had attended the art class ... maybe it was the naked man!

But why should going to an art class make a difference to things like memory? Clinical Psychologist Daniel Collerton says that part of the benefit came from learning a new skill. "Learning something new," he says, "engages the brain in ways that seem to be key. Your brain changes in response, no matter how many years you have behind you."

Learning how to draw was not only a fresh challenge to our group but, unlike the puzzlers, it also involved developing psychomotor skills. Capturing an image on paper is not just intellectually demanding, it involves learning how to make the muscles in your hand guide the pencil or paintbrush in the right directions.

An additional benefit was that going to the art class meant that for three hours a week they had to stand while drawing or painting—standing for longer periods is a good way of burning calories and keeping your heart in good shape.

The art class was also the most socially active, another important thing to bear in mind if you want to keep your brain sharp. This group met regularly outside class, were keen to exchange emails and there was a definite social aspect to this intervention. All of which meant that this group enjoyed a triple benefit when it came to boosting brain health.

One of our volunteers, Lynn, says that learning to draw had produced other, unexpected benefits. "Part of my job involves writing and pitching bids, which is a difficult and lengthy process," she explains. "I am dyslexic which is an added hurdle. But having done the art class I found that my writing now flows and my ability to concentrate has improved. It seems to have opened my mind. I'm not sure I can explain it properly, I just know it made a difference."

It is likely that any group activity which involves being active and learning a new skill will help boost your brain. Ballroom dancing, anyone?

*Michael Mosley studied medicine in London and qualified as a doctor but for the last 25 years he's been working as a documentary maker and an award winning science journalist. He regularly features on the BBC's Trust Me, I'm A Doctor.*

**TRAINING FOR NEW TUTORS**

We know that you would like to share your knowledge and skills with others and we also recognise that you may not feel very confident about the process. As we have often said, formal teaching skills are not necessary to pass on what you know. BUT, if you would like some help to feel more comfortable in taking a group, please register for the 1-day course, "Training Potential Tutors", being run on Tuesday September 15. This is a wonderful opportunity to show your support for your local U3A. Rest assured there are many people amongst our membership who will support anyone wanting to "give it a go" ... isn't that the spirit on which Australia was founded?

Go on ... put your hand up to pass on your skills or knowledge to others.

Contact Pam Rule on 0405184411 if you are interested in attending this training session.

