

# **FINAL TRANSCRIPT**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE**

### **Inquiry into Support for Older Victorians from Migrant and Refugee Backgrounds**

Geelong—Wednesday, 30 March 2022

#### **MEMBERS**

Ms Natalie Suleyman—Chair

Mr Brad Battin—Deputy Chair

Mr Neil Angus

Ms Christine Couzens

Ms Emma Kealy

Ms Michaela Settle

Mr Meng Heang Tak

#### **WITNESSES**

Ms Nanette Tunnicliffe, President, and

Ms Loretta Winstanley, former President, U3A Geelong.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the public hearing for the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee's Inquiry into support for older Victorians from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are meeting, and I pay my respect to their Elders both past and present and the Aboriginal Elders of other communities who may be here today.

I welcome here from U3A Geelong Nanette Tunnicliffe, the President, and also Loretta Winstanley, the former President. Thank you so much for taking the time to be here with us today. My name is Natalie Suleyman. I am the Member for St Albans out in the west, not out here, but anyway. To my left of course you will know Christine Couzens MP, the Member for Geelong, and we have got Meng Heang Tak MP, the Member for Clarinda.

All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, meaning that anything you say is protected here against any action, but if you say something or repeat it outside, including on social media, that protection may not be covered under this privilege.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript after this hearing, and you are able to check that transcript. Once it has been ticked off it will then be placed on the Committee's public website.

I now invite you to make a brief opening statement to the Committee, and then at the end we will have a few questions from the members. Thank you so much, Nanette.

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** Thank you for inviting us today. It is great to be here, and I hope I can give you something of value. U3A Geelong—well, as you know, we are a not-for-profit organisation, and we opened in 1986, so we have a quite a history behind us. We operate out of Cobbin Farm and seven other venues, predominantly out in the Grovedale region and a couple on the Bellarine. In 2020 we had 1040 members. Last year that dropped to 760, and this year we are at 800-plus. So there are 800 paying members, plus the honorary members. We are currently delivering 82 classes by 54 tutors, and they are predominantly face to face, so I am very interested in the digital literacy aspect of today. We run a small number of Zoom classes, but members and tutors are largely resistant to following Zoom.

Unlike a lot of U3As we have no age requirements, which means we can take anybody: as young as we like—not children, probably, but as young as we like—and you do not have to be retired. We want a blend of people at our U3A, and with the changing of the guard we are now getting younger members coming in, which is fantastic.

Any development has been impacted by COVID over the last two years, and as the new President last year I saw that we had a fairly insular outlook as far as we were concerned in the way we operated. We also suffered from considerable inexperience on the new committee, with a new president, new secretary and three new members. It was very difficult to operate via Zoom and not form a bond.

Our aim of course is to provide a broad range of learning, physical and social activities for our members across Geelong. We are now embracing the 'social' in a fairly large way. It has always been there, but we are now seeing the value for older people particularly of embracing the social. A lot of people struggled through COVID living by themselves, and they desperately missed the human contact.

The aim this year is also to extend classes to the Bellarine Peninsula. We have a huge number of members who travel up to Grovedale, and they are happy to do that. However, the Grovedale members are not happy to travel beyond Grovedale. It is too far.

U3A also provides an opportunity to volunteer. It is a case of: 'I don't want to necessarily be a tutor; I don't necessarily want to do classes. I want to work in the office. I want to participate in some of the organisation that is required for social activities'. It is that volunteering that is so very important to them.

We also seek to provide a safe and inclusive environment for members, physical as well as mental. We reviewed our policies last year, and they are pretty clear that we are there for the benefit of all. I am dealing with a disciplinary matter at the moment, and I make no qualms about having to do that sort of thing. We are also hoping, once we get back—our AGM is next week, with a new executive and new committee—to develop

more community interaction. I really think that we have suffered over the last few years, not looking beyond what we have got—treading water, I call it, which we did really, really well. But I feel we can bring so much more to members.

Learning opportunities—well, we offer a huge range of humanities. The new ones this year that have drawn particular attention are the Vietnam War, the *Titanic* and Behind the Screens, which is a television-based one. We have got our sciences of course, with psychology being introduced this year. Languages: we have lost Italian so we would like to expand our language base. We have had requests from members to get into Mandarin and things like that, but it is very difficult. We have music and arts and crafts. Fitness: we run tai chi, yoga and Movement For Life. We have enormous trouble coping with the numbers wanting to do that. We just simply cannot get the tutors. Unfortunately people, not all of them but some of them in those fields particularly, want to be paid. They do not understand that we are a volunteer organisation from go to woe and the minute you say, ‘Oh, no’, it is, ‘Oh, fine. Okay. Thank you very much’.

And our social gatherings: Loretta here ran the friendship in older age workshop via Zoom last year, which was very good. She has introduced a fabulous little course called ‘Let’s Do Stuff!’, which gets people to go out and about on trips into the community for lunch. It is purely a social class. And I run ‘Let’s Do Lunch’. I bring in all the food and everyone sits down and chats. I think the first week I ran that a darling old lady came up to me and she said, ‘It’s so nice to sit down and eat with someone other than myself’. So they are aspects of U3A that we are really seriously hoping to develop.

Technology and digital literacy are very limited amongst tutors and members. There is a strong resistance, probably because of the age of the tutors and the age of the membership, but, as I say, that is changing and now we will be embracing Facebook in a more visible way and other social media outlets—that is to attract new members. Up until the start of February alone we picked up 80 new members—mostly from Melbourne; people who have moved down here—so that was not too bad.

We have a lack of computer tutors. They are either too advanced or too obscure, and those classes just never work. We have a lack of hardware and we have wi-fi problems in the building. It is an old building, which is charming, but it comes with a bundle of problems.

We are hoping to run hybrid classes, which will be Zoom and face-to-face, next term. But in order to really do that successfully you need a sound system so that people can be miked up and ask questions and things like that, and that is going to be an enormous expense if we want to do it properly.

I have spent an enormous amount of time working with U3A Network Victoria and they are absolutely fabulous. I cannot speak highly enough about what they have done—the support, the encouragement, the suggestions and just what they offer in terms of programs and things like that, including marketing and all that sort of thing. Now that we are firmly entrenched with U3A Victoria I will be keeping that going.

Our problem, apart from sourcing tutors, is sourcing venues. Cost is a huge factor for us. To hire a venue it has to be economically viable for the number of people we have, and we find that places like the hubs, for example, which are fantastic, are really expensive unless you have got a class of 25 or 30. It makes it very, very difficult. And location of course—as I say, people are reluctant to travel; it does not matter that I travel from Drysdale four days a week.

Hearing: we find that a lot of our older members of course wear hearing aids and that a lot of buildings do not have that built-in sound system that helps people with hearing aids, and that would be a huge boost. We looked at buying one, but it would have to be wired in to Cobbin farm and we felt the council really would not go for that. But we will talk to the council about it.

Sourcing tutors: as I said, a lot of people want to be paid and that is just not on. So we looked last year, and we are running a recruitment program through the secondary schools, looking for part-time teachers and retiring teachers. If there was more communication more widely to schools, we feel we might pick up some good ones.

The last one of course is lack of public transport to Cobbin farm. It is down the end of a very long road, and no-one can walk it. That means that people who can no longer drive can no longer come, which rules out quite a few people. So we would love the council to certainly look at extending the bus down there. It does go down Grove Road to a certain extent but not right the way.

Of course the final problem we have is our name—University of the Third Age. You say that to people and they freak out: ‘I don’t want to do exams’, ‘I’m not doing assignments’, ‘I don’t want to go to a university’. So we do not call ourselves University of the Third Age anymore. We call ourselves U3A, and we are an adult learning environment that provides social and physical activities. You only have to say that word ‘university’ and it is a huge deterrent.

That is me from Geelong. Loretta is going to speak to you very briefly about Corio. They are in trouble; they are in big trouble.

**Ms WINSTANLEY:** Thank you very much for the opportunity. U3A Corio Bay is in a parlous situation. It started I think nine or 10 years ago. I was then president of Geelong U3A, and I was on the steering committee with the council to get U3A Corio going. I must acknowledge the huge amount of support that we have had from the city council. We get the premises in Corio—this is difficult because I have kind of got two hats; I am a member of both—the venue that we have, for free, which is unbelievably generous, but it is rather like Geelong’s problem, in that it is inaccessible by public transport. Initially we were given space down by the Corio library, which is extremely accessible, and we were there for a couple of years, but because the place is being redeveloped, we had to go.

The demographic is different because of the immigration policies of postwar Australia. We have the same problems that Nanette outlined, but there are the different nationalities’ social clubs, which are and have been, as you would know, extremely supportive of their people. The fact that we say ‘adult learning’ causes a bit of blowback—U3A is not welcome. When Corio started, I was one of the tutors. I ran a beginning English writing skills course because I taught ESL for a considerable period of my life, and whilst there was support from people verbally saying, ‘We’d love to do that’, there were only two people that enrolled, so that finished.

The way that we see our problem is that we have got a very small membership of about 140 people. They only come if they are very close to where we are in Bell Post Hill because of the transport issues, and also we lack support in being able to communicate or work with other groups. The city council’s policy is that the venues are to be intergenerational, that they are to be hubs for groups, but it is very hard to go out with our limited membership to other groups and say, ‘We’re here; we’d like to be able to help you. What do you want from us, if anything?’. So that is where we see an immediate need, someone to be able to broker meaningful cooperation with the other groups in Corio, Norlane—the northern suburbs of Geelong—and also to be able to work with schools. Because if we are dealing with and interacting with the school population, they are the people that can say to Nanna or Grandpa, ‘There is a U3A; why don’t you go to that?’, and we can start doing meaningful activities with these groups. Whilst I do not want it to be a group of oldies interacting with preschool kids and kinder like the television program, it needs to be at a higher academic level so that we can get that message of adult learning across.

But we do not know how long we are going to be able to survive. Our first committee meeting is tomorrow night. We are scratching to get a committee. I am the new secretary of Corio Bay so that legally we are okay, but it is where we go to from here. So thanks very much for the opportunity.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I will probably move on to questions. Chris.

**Ms COUZENS:** Thank you both so much for your time today. We really appreciate it, and your contribution has been quite significant, so thank you. Can I just ask, Loretta, where in Bell Post Hill you have been relocated to: is it Pettitt Park or somewhere?

**Ms WINSTANLEY:** Yes.

**Ms COUZENS:** Yes, okay—which is difficult to get to at the best of times.

**Ms WINSTANLEY:** Yes, up a very steep hill.

**Ms COUZENS:** Yes. I know. I am aware of it. You mentioned the need for—and maybe you did not say this—the resources to actually make this work. Is that right? So what you are suggesting is that you need that support to assist with that collaboration and co-design sort of approach.

**Ms WINSTANLEY:** Yes.

**Ms COUZENS:** Have you had connection with Diversitat, for example, or some of those?

**Ms WINSTANLEY:** Bearing in mind I only have been legally the secretary for about three days since I managed to work out CAV's website, I cannot tell you that, sorry, because the previous secretary is quite ill.

**Ms COUZENS:** Okay. I mean, it sounds to me like you are saying additional resources need to be provided in some shape or form to support that collaboration with other organisations. For example, we are obviously talking about older people from the CALD community and that connection with the likes of Diversitat or some of the multicultural communities and others, including City of Greater Geelong. Have they been able to assist? You probably do not know; you have only been there three days. I was wondering whether they have been able to assist in ensuring the ongoing work of Corio Bay U3A.

**Ms WINSTANLEY:** Yes. That is the way I see it. I would like to see that we would be able to run specialist English classes rather like the adult migrant education, where there is English in the workplace. We could run discussion groups or groups with members that have got technical skills, say, because we know each other and we know the members that we can draw upon in Geelong, because we are quite unusual in the U3A network. I think there are only two shires that have got two U3As in there. There are Colac and Apollo Bay and Geelong and Corio, so we have always worked together with a lot of things.

**Ms COUZENS:** Nanette, you talked about the need for IT—digital access and those sorts of things. Can you just expand a bit on that and how you think that might work?

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** I have found someone who can do the basics of computer work, things like emails, because our main form of communication with the members is through email. Otherwise for the ones who do not do email, we have to post out, which is a pain. We want to encourage members to start off with using their email backwards and forwards to us and that sort of thing to improve that communication and to give them confidence to perhaps go a little bit further, so we are looking at a series of short courses. Short courses have become popular. It is something I have started this year really. So we are looking at six weeks on email and then moving on to, if they want to, learning how to use the internet more extensively—how to use Facebook. I had a phone call from a lady yesterday who wants to come and learn how to use Facebook: 'I don't want my granddaughters to do it for me anymore. I want to do it'. I said, 'Right, okay'. But in order to do that, classes have to be small and we really do need to provide the hardware for them so that they are all on the same starting point. At the moment we do not have enough laptops, so that is something that we have to address before we can actually kick the classes off.

We do run one computer class. It is an introduction to computers, and the tutor runs it via Zoom, which I know sounds crazy—but it works, because I am in it. And he is wonderful. It is small. COVID is still impacting tutors who do not wish to come in—they have immunocompromised people at home. But in order to get people into that class you go, 'Oh, it's via Zoom', and they go, 'Oh, forget it'—so six of one, half a dozen of the other. I am hoping that these hybrid classes will encourage people to see that, using Zoom, they can come in and sit in a room and we can put it on the screen and show them how easy it is to work. I would encourage them to use their computers at home a little bit better, but they are resistant. They love the face to face. That is what U3A is all about, the face to face. Languages do really well on Zoom, but other classes do not. We tried that in lockdown last year, and it was very, very difficult. That is something that we want to embrace. Once again, I have now found a lady who can help us a little bit, but really, surprisingly, it is getting people to come in and tutor on computers at the level. We had an Excel expert who was up here; he started off with six, and the next week he had one. I think to be a computer tutor, well, you have got to be a good tutor. You have got to be able to relate to the insecurities of the people you are working with. Not everyone can be a teacher or a tutor, no matter how good they are or how nice they are.

**Ms COUZENS:** I think people probably want a particular focus on—I do not know why they would want to do Excel, unless they are doing some sort of graph work or something.

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** Some people do their bills on Excel and all sorts of things.

**Ms COUZENS:** Yes.

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** I was very sceptical. He got six, but it was just too complicated—far too complicated.

**Ms COUZENS:** Yes. I mean, often people just want to know how to use the thing.

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** I know: ‘How do I turn it on?’. You know, it is—

**Ms COUZENS:** ‘What do I do when this happens?’.

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** Yes. ‘Oh, the screen’s gone black’. ‘Right, okay.’ So it is on our to-do list. As I say, when the new committee comes back we will be rewriting our strategic plan, and digital technology is a big part of that, as is working with the outside marketing groups. But unfortunately in the last two years we could do nothing. This time last year I was so hopeful of all the stuff that we could do and then, bang, a week after the AGM: lockdown. Then back for a week and then lockdown, and then back for a week. So this is the year to really get stuck in.

**Ms COUZENS:** So do you have a focus—and I think you have mentioned working with multicultural groups—on culturally inclusive strategies that you are considering implementing? And I know, Loretta, you have mentioned that collaboration with other groups. Is that a similar sort of theme or—

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** That is what we will pursue. We are going to work with Grant Hawkins at the council and try and get some ideas about how to go about that, and it is something that I will be able to work with with other presidents. The south-west region presidents were very kind at the last meeting. I am going, ‘I’m new, you know. I don’t know’. So I do not believe in reinventing the wheel.

**Ms COUZENS:** No.

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** I believe in asking questions and putting it out there that ideally what I would love to see is that our curriculum, our courses, represent a broader cultural and ethnic strain than they currently do. As I say, the response to the Vietnam War—which is also a lot of social stuff; they are doing Vietnamese rolls next week and stuff—has been astonishing. I would love to get into food. I would love to get into food. Get people in an industrial kitchen with someone who can present something different.

**Ms COUZENS:** Yes, and in my experience that is a great way to engage multicultural organisations and groups and individuals as well—

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** Absolutely.

**Ms COUZENS:** through food, that cultural sharing and all that sort of stuff.

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** Yes. So another idea that has just sprung to mind is we do run occasional lectures. It is hard to get people to come and lecture, but that would be a great idea: to get someone from a cultural group to come and speak and then for them to provide us with a lunch and talk and chat and that sort of thing. So I am going home with a good idea.

**Ms COUZENS:** Good. Thank you both.

**Ms WINSTANLEY:** Thanks, Chris.

**The CHAIR:** Heang, did you have a question.

**Mr TAK:** No, I think I am out of questions.

**The CHAIR:** All right. I will have one final question. How can the Victorian Government support U3As, not just with culturally inclusive courses but in general? What are a few things that really stick out that the Victorian Government can do to support U3A?

**Ms WINSTANLEY:** If I could, I would like to see the intergenerational thing really pushed. That can be done through the school system, and that is the department of education, because that is where I see that the only thing that U3A seems to have going for it is that everyone says it is the world’s best kept secret. You know, people do not know, even though we advertise, so we really need someone to be able to hold hands with to say, ‘We’re not threatening. We’re not going to give you a test’. And that is where I think that a good social agenda would help.

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** I mean—the best kept secret. It is the best value in town: \$60 for a year and you do as many courses as you like. And when you think you go and do a tai chi course and that is \$30 for an hour— whoa! But this is where the marketing aspect I think is very important and Network Victoria run an excellent marketers group. But it is really getting our name out there, and as I say, we have been very Facebook hesitant. And the committee—I mean, I have gone, ‘Why don’t we join the Geelong historical Facebook page? It’s got 57 000 members, you know, and we don’t have to pay a cent’, and they go, ‘Oh, that’s Facebook’, and I go, ‘Yeah, but it’s a closed group’. It is the same with the Geelong art groups, you know, and things like that. That is the future for U3A, and so therefore we need to be able to find support for people who can help us with that digital projection. U3A Warrnambool have an incredible video on their Facebook page. It is young, it is dynamic, it is moving, it is music—it is all the things that U3A Geelong is not. You know, we are a flat photo of an old house. We need to change that approach, but we do not know how to.

**Ms WINSTANLEY:** I think also too in the preretirement area this really needs to be promoted: that there are other alternatives and that, you know, just because you are retired your brain does not stop; it still keeps working. So I think help in that scene too—like Barwon Health has offered occasional preretirement seminars for people, and for this to be promoted in small business would be incredibly valuable.

**Ms COUZENS:** Yes. I mean, you could even look at getting some of those older students to run courses.

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** Well, funnily enough, when I was doing the timetable for this year at the end of last year and we lost tutors—we lost tutors and we lost members of course—I just put it to the membership: ‘Do you know of someone? Could you offer something?’. That was a one-liner in the newsletter, and I got seven classes out of it, you know.

**Ms COUZENS:** Because people have all sorts of skills they can share with other people.

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** They have to recognise that it is not just that academic side as well, you know. I mean, we have got our crochet group and all that sort of stuff, but we have also got some other very good skilled groups, and so the membership are the people who will do as much publicity as you want them to do, but they have got to feel good about the place too, you know. It is hard when they have not been there for so long, but now they are back and they are excited, and 95-year-old Bill came along and enrolled in his 25th year of U3A.

**Ms COUZENS:** Wow. Fantastic.

**Ms TUNNICLIFFE:** Must be doing something right. But I think it has got to come from the committee, which has to be committed, active and passionate about getting the word out there. That is what I see as being really important, so we are going to do that.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent.

**Ms COUZENS:** Great. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I think that concludes our questions at this stage. Can I thank you both for all the work that you do and, most importantly, for making the time to be here and provide your valuable evidence. The next steps will be that in the next few weeks we will start deliberating the evidence and put forward hopefully a strong report back to government and table a report in the Victorian Parliament. Thank you so much again for being here today, and all the very best.

**Mr TAK:** And all the best for your AGM tomorrow.

**Ms WINSTANLEY:** I hope we get a quorum.

**Witnesses withdrew.**