

## **Who are we? What is the U3A?**

### **Origin of the Universities of the Third Age**

The concept of U3A was developed in Toulouse in 1972, to bring older people into contact with academic programs at the University. It spread rapidly through France and throughout Europe. Many universities either arranged for older people to participate in existing academic programs or established new programs specifically designed for Third Age students.

The first British U3A was established in 1982 at Cambridge. In contrast with the French experience, where U3A have a close association with traditional universities, as providers of educational programs, the British U3A have developed only outreach links with the universities.

Instead, they have embraced principles of self-help and self-determination, structuring programs and courses to meet the wishes of members and drawing on resources available within the membership as far as possible. These same principles have been adopted by U3A in Australia.

### **Development in Australia**

In July 1984, a public meeting was arranged in Melbourne to gauge public interest in U3A. As a result the first U3A was established in Melbourne City, followed by another in Hawthorn and the first courses were offered at the beginning of 1985. During that year two other U3A, one at Monash and one at Ringwood, were inaugurated. There are now more than 100 U3As in Victoria with some 35,500 members and more than 300 Australia-wide with a total national membership exceeding 100,000.

Williamstown/Hobsons Bay was established early in the history of the U3A in Victoria and has been in operation since 1988 and now have grown to more than 350 members.

Membership is open to persons not in the work force with the focus on retired persons. A number of members are still working in voluntary jobs, part-time or approaching retirement.