

Part of the solution to an ageing population

Kingborough U3A held an information forum in Adult Learners Week, September 2005, attended by over one hundred people. The morning session had speakers from six local senior groups including the Kingston Community Health centre. The afternoon session entitled "Nothing About Us Without Us" participants had their say on topics such as loneliness, access to information, better public transport, how to be able stay in the family home, community built and open space, a drop-in centre and a voice in our community. The day included two entertainment sessions a local choir and we danced our way out to a local jazz ensemble.

At a follow-up meeting Kingston Seniors Action Group was formed (KSAG).

Our aims were to:

- 1) initiate and encourage developments in Kingborough with regard to meeting the needs of seniors.
- 2) Encourage a wide range of activities for the mental, emotional and physical wellbeing of seniors.
- 3) To foster friendship and support for seniors.

Our first initiative was to have discussions with the sales manager of Metro Tasmania. We also presented a petition with over one thousand signatures to Kingborough Council for a park and ride centre in Kingston. We soon realised that as far as transport is concerned it needed considerable planning between the Council the Government and Metro, we were on a steep learning curve. Over the following four years we met monthly and had numerous forums on housing, transport, the physical, mental and emotional aspects of ageing, the need for a drop-in centre, participated in community forums, Council advisory committees and the development of a positive ageing plan for Kingborough. Our local representatives from all levels of government listened to us and supported and assisted our endeavours.

We developed a social network to support third age people in Kingston. This started in January 2006 with the 'Seniors Summer Taste of Kingborough'. Each year we had a summer program of social activities in January and February and from these regular events have continued, 'Coffee with Friends' now in four venues each week, monthly get-togethers in private homes and other social activities have expanded and developed to form a strong peer group support network. From these activities close friendships have developed and help with small household tasks between friends.

In 2009 we became more ambitious and became incorporated hoping to apply for community grants .Former MHA Paula Wreidt funded a small survey which suggested that a central centre would be well supported. Unfortunately we had difficulty arranging public liability insurance and KSAG collapsed as some members felt that any litigation might impact upon their assets.

U3A and Kingston online centre have continued a more formal summer program. Several former members are now on the Kingborough Positive Ageing Advisory Committee. Unfortunately the original social activities have not expanded.

Conclusion

I suggest that a federally funded community development program to assist active seniors have a voice in their community; to provide information and develop peer group mutual support networks should be given the opportunity to be part of the solution to an ageing population.

*We gratefully acknowledge the support of Kingborough Council.
The Hon Lara Giddings MHA
Ross Butler MHA retired
Daniel Hulme MHA retired
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