



Third Age Network (TAN)

an association of lifelong learning groups in Ontario

www.thirdagenetwork.ca

Newsletter

October 2020

Annual General Meeting

by Sheilagh Hickie

Like most groups these days, TAN's meeting was held via Zoom on September 23 and was well attended by our various representatives in the Province.

Elsewhere in this Newsletter you will find President Cathy Spark's report as well as information on our current membership, Board and Executive Committee members and finances.

As an early board member (and in fact, along with the Academy's president Dugal Campbell, the host of our first ever meeting of potential TAN groups), I was most impressed by the quality of the presentations and the

interest shown by our reps. In the very early days, it was a bit of a hard slog to get people to a annual meeting. We had a lot of interest especially from Toronto-based learning groups but direct action was difficult to find.

That has greatly changed as Louise Pope, our Membership Committee chair reported. From an initial gathering of about five, we now have 33 member organizations from London north to Nipissing and Mississauga east to Oshawa.

For those of you unable to attend, here are the photos of our current Executive Committee members.



President Cathy Spark



*Past President Nancy Christie and
Treasurer Carole Langford*



Vice President Gaby Arato



Secretary Sandy Thurston



Director Sandra Kerr



Director Louise Pope

President's Report

By Cathy Spark

Well, here we are! Little did we think when we heard Nancy's address at last year's AGM that things would have changed so much before we would assemble at the next one. We even postponed our AGM from its usual May slot to September in the hopes that things would have returned to normal. But that didn't happen, and, instead, we find ourselves in what is, in effect, a new normal - at least for the time being.

While we often consider ourselves to be well-informed and organized to deal with any eventuality, we are never really prepared to deal with a challenge like COVID-19. COVID, along with the lockdown it necessitated, came into effect in March just as some of us were in the last stages of our series or term, and others were just about to launch a new one. All of a sudden, we had to make informed decisions quickly as new restrictions made it impossible for us to meet in person. Would we stop our sessions? Delay them? Was there an alternative?

Zoom to the Rescue

And then Zoom came to the fore as a possible lifeline. We could use the platform to offer lectures, talks, or workshops online in real time! The cost to do so was reasonable and some of your members were already familiar with it. It might be a perfect solution. But what about your members who may not have the requisite skills or hardware? Or who might feel challenged or concerned about the changes involved? Or who might be loathe to let go of the opportunities to socialize that your programs offer to them? These were important considerations as isolation began to become an issue.

The decisions made and solutions arrived at were as varied as the issues I have just listed. Some groups decided to postpone or cancel their series or terms. Some took their whole program and offered it online via Zoom webinars; for free. As people got more comfortable with this option, many of you found, to your delight, that your sessions frequently drew 700+ attendees.

The situation forced you and your Boards to develop skills that you may not have had before, or utilized recently - like learning to run webinars or run workshops using Zoom; or looking differently at both

long- and short-term planning as it became necessary to adjust your approach according to factors we could neither anticipate nor control.

You needed to adjust your deliverables accordingly, and to provide training and support as some of your scheduled speakers had to come up to speed on delivering lectures using Zoom. The form and frequency of your communication to members likely also had to be adjusted. And you may have had to introduce functions like online registration through your website. - and do all of this in a very tight timeframe and on a very steep learning curve.

And that is where being a member of the TAN community came into play. We all shared the same basic challenges and the same uncertainty about when we would return to normal. With Zoom as a tool, we weren't restricted by distance any longer, and so it became easier to get together. A section was created on the website where members could find information on how to use Zoom effectively and where they could share their own experiences in moving online. We hope that this type of information repository will be used more frequently as a way to get the best from our collective experience.

Online Webinars

We introduced a new way to network, through a series of informal discussion groups. These brought together TAN reps, along with members of their Boards, to discuss common challenges, share best practices and just to chat with others to ask questions and make connections. This year's sessions:

You cancelled your programs, now what?

The selection & management of speakers.

To incorporate or not to incorporate.

As they were popular and well-attended, we will be holding others on a regular basis in the coming months. We will be looking to you for ideas about the topics that you would like to address.

So what will next year look like? We don't know, but we do know that it is highly likely that things will not have returned

Continued on Page 3

President's Report

From Page 2

to normal whatever that is! That is where the next challenge lies for TAN and for you as members. We will need to undertake more short- and long-term planning to ensure that the changes we make to our approach and our programmes do not have a contrary impact on our brands

Our Challenges

We will need to define, or re-define, who we are as organizations and what our mandates will be now – in the light of the way that COVID will change our lives.

We will need to look at the way our context is changing – with things like the increase in for-profit lifelong learning programs; the growth in Ontario's Age Friendly Universities initiatives and the programmes they offer; and the vast selection of MOOTs readily available online for little, or no, money.

Like your strategic planning groups, TAN's TANplan committee will be working with the Executive to see how we might adapt and grow.

Might we develop closer ties with organizations like us outside of Ontario – in the rest of Canada and the north?

Might we find new ways to network within TAN – in smaller groups that share characteristics and concerns– by size, location, type of program, etc.

No matter how we move forward in the coming months, we have seen in the past year that coming together as a strong network of lifelong learning groups allowed us to

collaborate in sharing experience, expertise, innovation and drive.

I would like to encourage you to continue to take an active role in TAN by:

Ensuring that your contact information is up to date

Sending us your speaker information so that it can be shared with other members

Participating in future discussion and information-sharing sessions and including members of your Board or committee chairs for relevant topics

Contribute to surveys or questionnaires that we may use to collect feedback about your current concerns / ideas

Together as members of TAN we can ensure that we are positioned for growth and success – no matter what challenges get thrown our way.

Thank You

I would like to give a personal thank you to the members of the TAN Executive who work tirelessly to keep us relevant and to deliver value to you all:

Nancy Christie – Past President', Gaby Arato – Vice President, Carole Langford – Treasurer, Sandy Thurston – Secretary, Louise Pope – Membership Chair and Sandra Kerr – Director at Large

And a special thanks to Sheilagh Hickie for the marvelous work she does on our newsletter!

Challenges are what make life interesting and
overcoming them is what makes life
meaningful

- Joshua J Marine

How We Dealt With Covid

by Sheilagh Hickie

As Cathy has mentioned in her report, Covid became a huge challenge for TAN's members but it's great to see that we are coping well.

A quick look at our website (we now have 33 members) shows that 18 groups have adapted to using Zoom or Webinars. Some organizations don't yet have a website so this may not be up to the minute. What it has meant for many is a learning curve with regard to online programs and in this regard, we've done very well. Below are articles from the Academy for Lifelong Learning, Bluewater Association for Lifelong and Burlington Third Age Learning.

Burlington TAL

by Graham Swanson

Covid's virtual meetings have presented a challenge to our fall series of sessions. Despite the changes needed to make presentations appealing to our members, we are excited to move ahead with eight presentations this fall.

3ALB has had our latest Series 18: Reaching People Through the Arts ready to go on the Zoom platform. All the presenters are keen to use this format. Our program committee has worked hard to make this a seamless event. Other Third Age Learning members can log into our website 3ALB.org to review the program and join us.

This will be our first Zoom webinar format lecture series. It will be a great Third Age Learning experience for all of us. The first session Sept 10 was well attended. We are open to having members of other learning groups join us at 3ALB.org.

We are also excited to launch our new website. The address is the same but a new logo and new facilities make it easier to navigate and brighter. Thanks to our web team.



Bluewater Lifelong Learning

by Ann Magner

BALL is Back! That announcement on August 14, 2020, was long awaited and greeted with enthusiasm and anticipation by lifelong learners in Grey and Bruce County. In March, when lectures were cancelled due to Covid19, our generous membership chose to donate the \$8500 of residual money to the Hospital Foundation in Owen Sound to help combat the virus, with the understanding that a portion would be transferred to the other Foundations in Grey Bruce County.

A small sub-committee of BALL directors and other volunteers then got down to work in the spring via Zoom videoconferencing to investigate delivering program on-line to our members. Our first lecture, a webinar titled 'A Presidential Election Unlike Anything We've Seen Before', aired on September 10th and was a resounding success! The BALL Board of Directors held its rescheduled Annual General Meeting on-line on September 17th.

Finally in 2020, BALL is offering a fall lecture series of six on-line lectures on World Religions. This Zoom webinar series takes place from October 29 to December 3rd at a cost of \$45. The remainder of the 2020 – 2021 season is planned, and available to read about under the Lectures tab on the BALL website at www.bluewaterlearns.com.

Academy for Lifelong Learning

by Sheilagh Hickie

Because the Academy is a peer learning group where members do their own research on a topic and make a presentation to others, the Zoom learning experience was essential and potentially more complicated than other TAN organizations. TAN's president, Cathy Spark, was part of the tech team who came up with the idea of a series of videos which took us through the intricacies of Zoom and frankly, at first, scared the heck out of us. But, gradually, with lots of practice and help from the tech team members, we became relatively proficient. Now

that we have all held our first workshop, I can say that we are improving and the problems are now challenges to overcome. We have purchased six Zoom licenses, set up a central booking of Zoom meetings, provided coaching to facilitators especially, and gone online with tech team help at the first workshop, Says Cathy, "we were pleasantly surprised by the level of comfort that many of our members had."

I echo that—I now sleep at night!

TAN Membership on the Rise

by Louise Pope, Membership Chair

It has been an eventful and rewarding year as TAN has welcomed four new members including Cambridge Third Age Learning, Foundation for Building Sustainable Communities, Hanover and Area Learning Association, Midtown Later Life Learners (Toronto) and Wasaga Beach Library Lifelong Learning. There are currently 33 members in good standing.

There were inquiries from the Midland and Paris areas concerning starting up a lifelong learning group but neither worked out in the end.

The membership chair has appreciated the support of Cathy, Carole and the rest of the Executive Committee. A thank you to Nancy Christie, Cheryl Avrigh and Pat Mansfield who assisted in providing mentorship to new clubs this past year.



How Are We Doing Financially?



Quite well according to Carole Langford's report at the AGM. You can go online for the Financial Statement—here are the highlights only.

Our revenue in 2019 was \$3,079 down from \$8,325 due to the generous donation from LIFE Institute of \$5000. However, our expenses were also down from \$4,198 in 2018 to \$1,211 last year, the difference being the cost of a revised website.

Board and Executive Committee

Past President Nancy Christie submitted nominations for both committees which were subsequently approved.

Executive Committee:

President	Cathy Spark
Vice President	Gaby Arato
Secretary	Sandy Thurston
Treasurer	Carole Langford
Directors at large	Sandra Kerr, Louise Pope
Past President	Nancy Christie

Board Members

Third Age Learning Burlington	till 2021
Lifelong Learning Mississauga	till 2021
Georgian Triangle Collingwood	till 2022
Lifelong Learning Markham	till 2022
Third Age Learning Guelph	till 2022
LLL at Innes College Toronto	till 2022
Academy for LLL Toronto	till 2023
Learning Unlimited Etobicoke	till 2023
LIFE—Ryerson Toronto	till 2023
LLL in Retirement Toronto	till 2023

Keeping our Brains Healthy

In order to handle Zoom and Covid and all the challenges implied, we must keep our brains healthy. We were lucky enough at the AGM to have a speaker whose work it is to help us do just that.

Dr. Andrea Wilkinson, PhD cofounded Brain Shape in 2014 and has spoken to many groups like ours since then. She outlined how we could remain brain healthy and there is much more information on her website, www.BrainShape.ca or her podcast www.BrainShape.ca/podcast

She talked about the four pillars of health: Food and Nutrition, Physical Fitness, Socializing and Mental Considerations. Also she explained that the temporal lobe in our brain is involved with language and the frontal lobe with selecting and organizing thoughts.

She encouraged us to employ the Mediterranean Diet which, among other benefits, helps us to regulate blood sugar. Diabetics, for instance, who often have difficulties regulating their blood sugar have an increased risk of dementia.

Exercise, which we all know we should be doing, protects our cognition and she recommended we do 30 minutes per day.

Why should we socialize? It helps us achieve a higher level of empathy, gives us more emotional support and should increase our memory.



Dr. Andrea Wilkinson

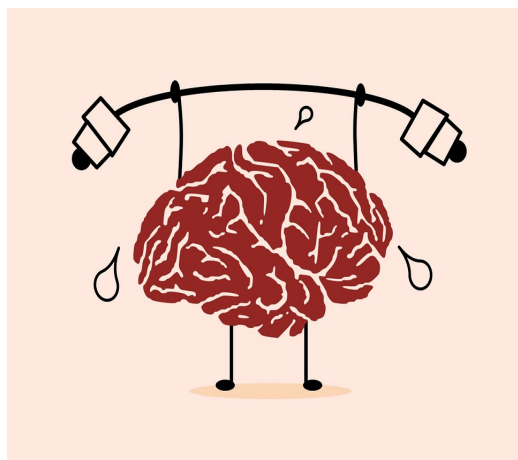
Chronic stress is something to avoid as it often results in poor sleeping which in turn increases the risk of cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's. We did a deep breathing exercise to help us manage stress—breathe in for four counts and out for eight. To promote good sleeping habits, Dr. Wilkinson said we should have no screens at night.

To promote our brain health, we should look at undertaking new and interesting tasks. Clearly, being involved in later life learning is a big plus.

More on Aging

If you would like to know more about healthy aging, take a look at the TED talks on the subject.

[https://www.ted.com/playlists/620/what s the secret to living l](https://www.ted.com/playlists/620/what_s_the_secret_to_living_l)



For your help in making this Newsletter possible. Please continue to send your articles, photos, etc to me,

Sheilagh Hickie at shickie@bell.net