The Southport U3A Russian Language and Culture Group 2020.

We are a group of six ladies and our host Chris Devereux, who usually meet every other Thursday at our host’s home in Birkdale. Over time we have become a really close-knit group looking out for each other and enjoying our common goal of learning the Russian language and learning about all different aspects of Russian culture. Because we come from diverse backgrounds, we each individually use our own personal skills and interests, such as Art, Music, Literature, History etc. Although I am new to the group and have taken over a year to learn the Cyrillic alphabet, while the others talk freely in Russian and discuss grammar, I am able to do my own private study., during this part of the morning.

After this we enjoy a much-earned coffee break with great biscuits which we bring individually when it is our turn to do the cultural talk. After these talks, we really discuss all sorts of topics relating to this and quite often have some very intense exchanges of conversation. But it is all good FUN too.

So, when in March we heard that we could not meet anymore because of lockdown it was very hard at first because to some of us who live on our own, it was a lifeline. However, we thought we would look at Skype, which did not work very well, but then one of the group set up Zoom and we have never looked back. For me knowing I still have my Thursday morning, every other week, keeps me going, which during this year has been important for our mental well- being. So how do we overcome the problems of giving on-line a language and culture session?

We decided to read through Chekov Anna Karenina, in Russian of course, and we have managed very well. Each time we take it in turns to run the session and guide each one of the group through the morning. We still enjoy our coffee break and then re-join the zoom group for a chat while we all re-assemble. IT may not be everyone`s strong point but we have learnt a lot since doing this and we can now share images on the zoom and videos as well as each one of us talking. We send out to the group the outline of the session so people can prepare or just know what is going on. However, on our Winter Study Day I was just starting my talk on Russian Costumes through history and my laptop decided it was `on holiday` and cut out. We had been enjoying some short videos of Russian comedy film sketches so the others watched some more, I believe and nothing was lost. Modern technology is wonderful….when it works.

We normally have our Summer and Winter study days out somewhere and have been to the Sparrowhawk Restaurant in Ainsdale and Salmesbury Hall for example. I organised a great trip out to the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight two years ago. Although we could not do this, this year, we still made the day special because we did not want to lose what we have in our very special little group. We have a lot of friendship and fellowship and I personally am very grateful to Chris for keeping us all going during this very difficult time.

Let us hope it will not be long before we can meet up again in person.

Jannice Crawford, U3A Member