

Literacy Matters

Keeping you up to date with literacy news in Ireland and informing you of the work NALA is doing

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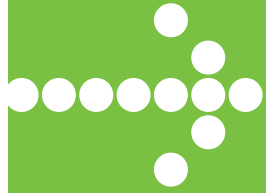
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1980–2010 Celebrating 30 years

Welcome



Welcome to the first "Literacy Matters" of 2010. It offers a mix of news, resources and reviews. Since our last edition, we have turned 30. Our lead story describes how we celebrated at a reception hosted by President Mary McAleese in Áras an Uachtaráin for literacy tutors and students.

This year also marks 10 years of our literacy television programming. Read all about our latest series 'Stuck for Words'.

In response to your requests, our next piece provides an update of our own and others' teaching and learning resources and relevant recent research.

'And the awards go to...' is an interesting and inspiring piece on this year's health literacy and the Adults Continuing Education award winners, both of which coincidentally, went to literacy projects for teenagers.

Our last articles relate to people in literacy. Specifically, the forums for students, tutors and adult literacy organisers, where students, tutors and organisers met to talk, learn and share good practice on literacy related topics.

We also have a short note on our Strategic Plan review and development process. Thanks to all of you who contributed. Keep an eye on our website for updates and further chances to feedback.

We would be delighted to consider including any articles that you may want to submit for our next edition which will be published in Autumn. We would also welcome your views on ideas for our next edition. Ring or email me and we can talk.

We hope you enjoy this edition of Literacy Matters and that you read it during, what we hope will be, a sunny summer!

Claire O'Riordan

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Tel: 01 850 9122
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Dublin
Wednesday
08
September

For more information call
NALA on **01 855 4332**

International Literacy Day Conference

Date 8 September 2010
Time 11.00am – 6.30pm
Location Royal Hospital,
Kilmainham, Dublin 8

NALA will hold a National Literacy Conference on Wednesday 8 September 2010 in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin. This is International Literacy Day and will be the high point of our 30th birthday celebrations, with contributions from international literacy experts and a celebratory reception for tutors and students.

11am – 1pm

The role of adult basic education interventions in contributing to Ireland's recovery – presentations and Q&A.

2pm – 4pm

Launch of 'Write On for 4 Work' – an online distance learning programme providing major and minor awards at FETAC level 3 and a system of recognition for prior learning for unemployed people with literacy and numeracy needs.

Launch of new campaign to encourage adults to 'Improve your maths' followed by presentations on new teaching methods and practices for the further education and training sector.

4.30 – 6.30pm

NALA will host a national reunion for literacy tutors and students, past and present, from around the country. The aim of the event is to celebrate the role of volunteers and the achievements of students in NALA's 30th year.

The conference will be open to anyone involved in adult literacy provision in Ireland and other key stakeholders in the education and training sector.

For more information call
NALA on **01 855 4332**

Celebrating our birthday with President McAleese



President welcomes NALA staff

To mark our 30th birthday, our patron, The President of Ireland Mary McAleese, hosted a fabulous reception in Áras an Uachtaráin on Wednesday the 28th of April 2010. 150 of us went. These included a student and volunteer tutor from each of the 33 VECs, student participants in our TV and radio series and publicity work, our student subcommittee, current and former Executive Members, sponsors, staff and other key stakeholders.

We arrived at the Áras. The excitement was palpable. President McAleese greeted us all individually and posed for photographs. We all felt very welcome. She then made a very touching and informal speech. She said that,

“NALA’s professional and volunteer team has for thirty years been a source of liberation and encouragement to thousands of people. In their homes and communities they have each been powerful witnesses to the way that education can open up a life”.

The President said that literacy was an issue very close to her heart and that NALA, whilst small in size, had made a very large and profound impact on raising awareness of adult literacy issues.

“Thanks to NALA we are all more clued in to the kind of problems people have with literacy issues including things like financial literacy, dealing with banks, building societies or credit unions, or jargon literacy - dealing with filling out complicated forms – all of these things help people to take control over their own lives and to ensure their fullest talents and skills are blossoming as they should.”

In particular, the President talked about the courage of the literacy students who went back to learning and how one adult literacy student described to her how life before adult literacy classes was ‘like living in a matchbox’. The President concluded her speech by saying,

“I congratulate you on your wonderful, inspirational, life-enhancing work of the past three decades. I am so proud of what you have achieved. Enjoy every moment of the thirtieth anniversary celebrations and I look forward to seeing what NALA can achieve in the next thirty years.”

Inez Bailey, NALA Director then spoke. She said how she really appreciated the way the President had always actively supported literacy. Inez reminisced about her first meeting with the President. She knew that she had a great empathy for literacy and was encouraged by her

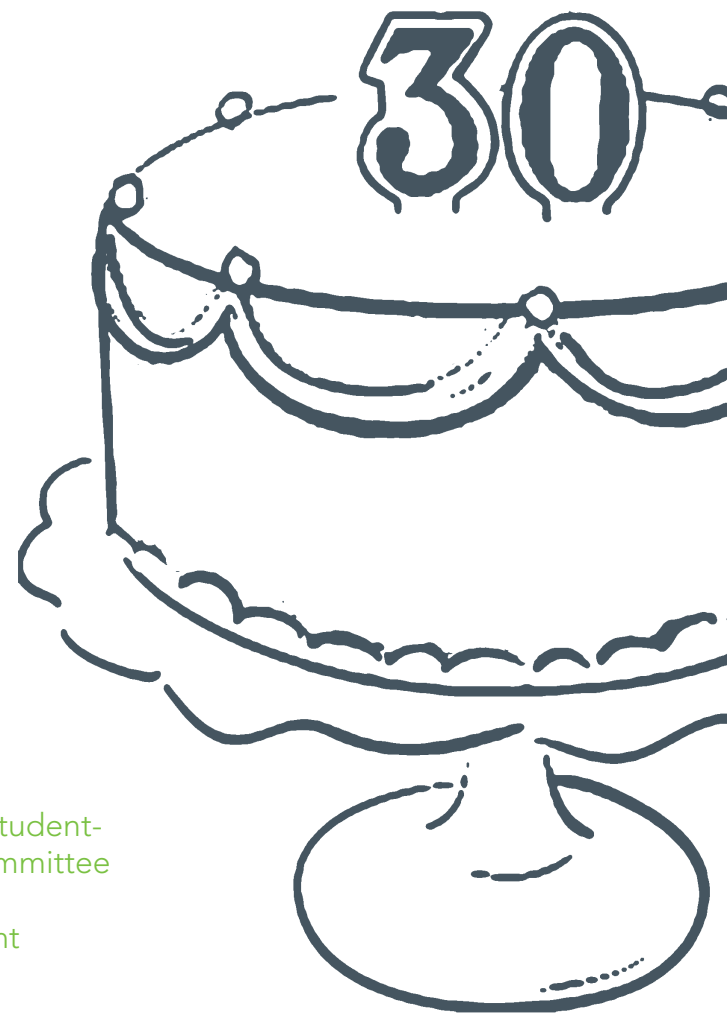
pledge to do as much as she could to support literacy issues. Years later Inez said that the President had indeed honoured this promise, over and above her highest expectations. The President also encouraged Inez as Director to ‘think big’. Inez said that this advice had been highly motivational over the years. Inez also made reference to the very significant role of the VEC Adult Literacy Service in forwarding the literacy agenda.

Inez presented the President with ‘Written Off’, a book of student writings.

After the speeches we were treated to a delightful reception. The atmosphere and staff at the Áras were warm and there was a tremendous sense of celebration and achievement.

The afternoon was truly a once-in-a-life time event that meant so much to all who attended. NALA would like to thank the President, Mr. McAleese and the staff at the Aras for sharing in our birthday celebrations and making it our best yet.

Why not check out our facebook and see more pictures of our 30th birthday celebrations at the Áras. Or read the President’s speech in full on her website – <http://www.president.ie>



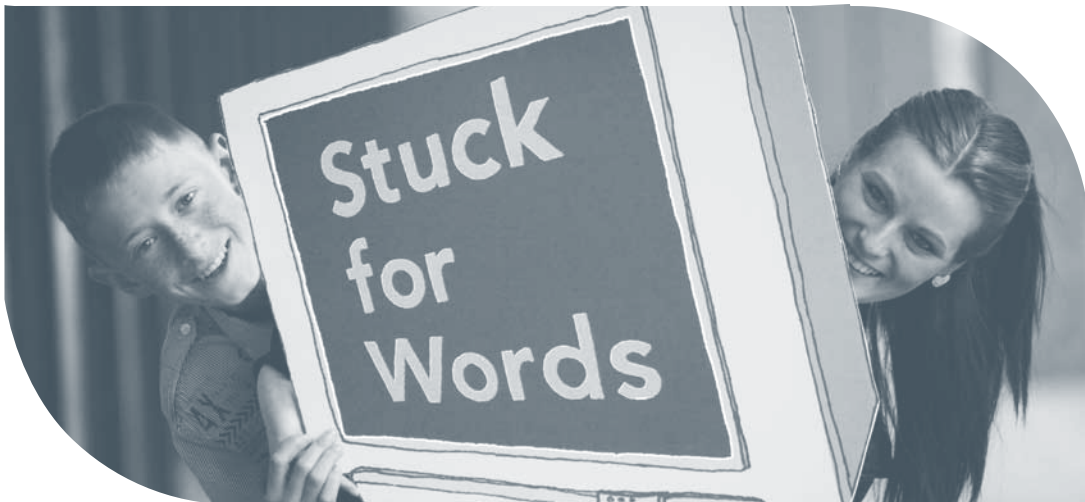
NALA Student-Sub Committee with the President



NALA Executive

Stuck for Words

“Our TV programmes represent the brave and inspiring people who are sharing their learning journey so that others might follow,”
Inez Bailey, Director, NALA



Chez and Chantelle at the launch of Stuck for Words

Most of us take reading and writing for granted but for thousands of Irish people it's a constant struggle. 'Stuck for Words', is our tenth TV series with RTÉ One and tells the story of some of these people and the profound impact going back to education is having on their lives. Once again, it was an enormous success when it was broadcast at 7.30pm on RTÉ One from Monday 10 May to June 14th with average weekly viewership an impressive 200,000 per episode, representing 20% of the viewing public.

In Programme one, we met four very different teenagers from Coolock. Paul, Chantelle and Chez all struggled in the traditional education system and dropped out of school early with very poor literacy. 17 year old Julie, a member of the travelling community, had never been to school. Now all of them are attending their local Youthreach - a centre that gives teenagers a second chance at education. This programme let them tell their own story in their own words and shows how a little support can go a long way.

Following the show the teenagers went on to become big stars with appearances on the Afternoon Show and The Ray D'Arcy Show on Today FM.



Tom Flynn
from Limerick

Tom Flynn from Limerick
“The biggest problem with not being able to read and write is that people will find out the problem – you just build up a fear in yourself. You just don't want anyone to know,” says Tom Flynn from Knocklong, Co. Limerick who featured in the second episode of 'Stuck for Words'.

Like many people his age, Tom left school without being able to read and write and spent many years living with the fear of being found out. “I left school at 14 and got work on a farm because there was no reading and writing on that. I was always afraid people would look down on me because when you can't read and write you feel you can't talk to people who are more education than you.”

“This is going to be like school, I had in my own mind. But when I got in there it was completely different. It was a different setting altogether. The first thing I did was learn to write my own name!” says Tom. 8 years on, he's still learning.



Anita Hopkins
from Dublin

Anita Hopkins from the north inner city left school at 12 with very poor reading and writing skills, to work in a sewing factory. She worked there for 17 years. “You find the years go by and then you're in a rut,” says Anita, who features in the third episode of 'Stuck for Words'.

Like many people with literacy difficulties, Anita was very embarrassed, especially when she couldn't help her niece with homework. “Alanis (niece) one evening was doing her homework at the table and she said 'Auntie, what's that word?' and I remember going over and looking at the copy and I said to myself 'I don't know this word' and she looked up at me as if to say 'You don't know?'. I was embarrassed the way she looked at me,” says Anita. That is until three years ago when her daughter Zoe was born and she took the brave decision to go back to education in the Dublin Adult Learning Centre.

“When I finish my course in September I'm going to have to look for work. I don't want to go back to the 17 years of sewing...I've 'been there, done that!' I feel I can move on with the skills I have now. I'll also be watching Zoe, and sit with her doing her homework to make sure it's done properly. She will not be like her mother leaving school. I'd love to see her even go to college.” says Anita.



Tom Walsh, Kieran Kane and Martin O'Shea from Kilkenny

Although different ages and from different backgrounds the recent recession has given Tom Walsh, Kieran Kane and Martin O'Shea from Kilkenny something in common. Faced with continued unemployment they have all gone back to education to improve their basic skills.

Tom from Bennetsbridge was made redundant from a manufacturing job in a local factory just over two years ago. "I was gutted. Mind you, at the same time, we knew it was coming. But when it did actually come, it was hard. Hard to take because I'd say in about 30 years I've spent three months on the dole. The thought of having to go out and find work, to have to start looking again wasn't a nice feeling," he says.

Kieran's business in French polishing has also suffered during the recession. Recently he returned to work on the family farm. "There's not much money in it but sure it gives you something to do when there isn't that much work around," says Kieran from Ballyragget.

Similarly Martin, who is from Kilmoganny, left school at 14 and has spent much of his life working in construction. Now like so many other people in that sector, he faces unemployment. All three struggled with writing and spelling over the years and in the fourth episode of 'Stuck for Words', they talked openly about the difficulty this has caused. Last year, each of the men enrolled in adult literacy classes in 'Word Aid', Kilkenny, where they have become close friends. With all three men being hurling fans, they have been set an appropriate challenge in the TV series – they must attend a Kilkenny match, write a report together, and submit their copy to the Kilkenny People the following day for inclusion in that week's paper.

"It's given us great confidence and self belief that we can actually sit down and write something together. To actually get an article in the paper is a great achievement," adds Tom.

Going back to education as an adult isn't always easy but all three men are delighted they started at Word Aid in Kilkenny. "I was nervous and excited at the same time because it was something I wanted to do for a long time but just hadn't had the time to do it I suppose. When I was unemployed and had time on my hands it was a great opportunity to go back and do something," says Kieran who now meets up with the others every Friday to read the papers in Kilkenny City library.

"When my friends say to me now, "Oh, you're back in school, are you mad?" I say "No! It's the best thing that ever happened to me". I used to think I'm going to be at home for the rest of my life and I'll never do anything different. Being a mother, a wife, a committee member – being everything to everybody and nothing to myself. Going back to education has opened up a new world to me and new opportunities and new people. I'm going to make the most of it. I really am," says Jackie, who features in the fifth episode of 'Stuck for Words'.



Jackie Finney, Castletown

It was when Jackie's daughter went to Australia that she decided to do computer classes in Navan VEC so they could keep in contact.

Using a computer has now become vital in Jackie's life. "I used to be afraid of the computer – if it was plugged in, it would stay plugged in for the day because I wouldn't touch it. Now I take pictures on my phone, stick them up on the computer and in a few minutes my daughter can see what's happening in Australia. I feel like I haven't lost her thousands of miles away."

Computer classes led Jackie to enroll in other courses that develop core skills for getting back to work, including writing, numeracy and interview skills. Her confidence has improved so much that she recently went for an interview and got a job in a crèche.

"I think that if you really, really want something you will get it. I believe that if something is dear to your heart then go for it, because the only person you are going to let down is the person that thought they wouldn't get it anyway – which was yourself!"



John Smith from Dun Laoghaire

In the last programme we met John Smith from Dun Laoghaire. Like many people with literacy difficulties John didn't like school. "The classes were huge so if you weren't interested you could sit at the back and no one would bother you," he says. However, since he enrolled in the Sallynoggin Adult Learning Centre he has made fantastic progress – now's he doing computer courses and is in a book club in the centre. Moreover he's confidence has improved greatly.

'Stuck for Words' is a joint project between RTÉ and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) with support from the BCI Sound & Vision fund.

Did you know?

Viewers can call NALA Freephone, 1800 20 20 65 where they are matched with a distance education tutor or directed to a local VEC adult literacy service. Learners also have the option of working towards a nationally accredited award. Learners who wish to learn online can use our interactive learning website www.writeon.ie

And the awards go to...



Una O'Brien holds trophy at the Crystal Clear Awards. Jennie Lynch (NALA) and Ciara O'Rourke (MSD) in the background

There is a lot of good adult literacy projects out there and since the mid 2000s, we have been awarding some of them. Each year we hold two national award ceremonies for innovative projects which show excellence in literacy.

- Crystal Clear Merck Sharpe & Dohme (MSD) Health Literacy Awards; and,
- The ACE Awards in association with the EBS.

Coincidentally, this year both awards went to literacy projects related to teenagers.

Una O'Brien, a staff midwife from Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, was amongst the winners of the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards for her pioneering project, 'Txt and Twitter ur Teenage Mums. B in Touch.' Una developed this project after noticing that many teenage mothers were unprepared for the birth of their child. She won first place in the category, 'Best Project in the Community or in a Social Setting' for her efforts to provide pregnant teens with as much information as possible and to encourage them to attend antenatal classes using text messages and Twitter.

Speaking at the awards ceremony, Ms Ciara O'Rourke, judge and External Affairs Director, MSD, said, "As the health literacy demands being placed on patients continues to rise, it is heartening to see so many initiatives putting patients needs first. All the finalists and winners recognised here today demonstrate best practice; having improved the public's understanding of their illnesses, empowering them to take more responsibility and make more informed decisions about managing their own health".

Six other organisations were also recognised for their efforts to communicate more clearly and for making information more accessible to the public. The winning initiatives were selected from over 120 entries.

Other award winners included: DEBRA Ireland for their entry, 'My Diary,' a tool to provide information to healthcare professionals and families who may never have heard of the rare skin condition Epidermolysis Bullosa; and the Irish Osteoporosis Society, for their project, 'Osteoporosis: the Silent Disease DVD and accompanying Educational Pack.' The Fatima & Dolphin Health Projects were recognised for their initiative which tackles the high rates of ill-health within Fatima Mansions and Dolphin House estates and improves the holistic wellbeing of the community.

Health literacy is increasingly recognised as an important issue in Ireland. Research shows that many people in Ireland struggle to read and understand health-related information such as directions on medicine packs, medical advice, consent forms and health information leaflets. However, over the past three years, the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards has received over 360 entries from receptionists in GP surgeries, nurses, hospital catering managers, pharmacists, doctors and patient advocates, all making efforts to make health communication clearer.

The judging panel for the awards is represented by individuals from NALA, MSD, the Health Service Executive, the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), the Irish Practice Nurses Association (IPNA), UCD, a General Practice and the Adelaide Hospital Society.

Further information on health literacy and the Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards can be found at www.healthliteracy.ie

Project to tackle teenage literacy wins 2010 EBS/NALA ACE Awards



Yasmin Fortune holds ACE Award

'Liter-a-Teen' a project aimed at teenage literacy students has been awarded the prestigious 2010 EBS / NALA Adults Continuing Education (ACE) Awards for its innovative work within the sector.

At present in Ireland there are very few educational materials geared specifically to Irish teenagers with literacy difficulties. This project aims to explore the literacy needs of teenagers in Ireland and to develop age appropriate teaching and learning material, to address their needs. The County Wicklow VEC Youthreach was awarded a research grant by EBS Building Society at an award ceremony held at Newman House in Dublin. The awards, now in their fifth year, are supported by EBS Building Society.

As overall winners, Wicklow's Liter-a-Teen project was given €10,000 to further develop and publish their research which identifies the specific literacy-based needs of teenagers. Findings from the project will be shared with other adult literacy tutors and will help to influence good practice across the adult literacy sector.

Speaking at the awards ceremony, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Seán Haughey TD said: "[The] ACE awards is a showcase for innovation in literacy projects around Ireland. It is a day of celebration and recognition. ... By sharing best practice across the country we enable and empower providers nationwide to deliver ever improving levels of service to those who need it most."

South West Dublin Adult Learning Centre, City of Dublin VEC, came second for their project which looked into the deployment of the adult literacy tutor. The aim of this project is to investigate the effectiveness of using volunteers in adult literacy provision, from both educational outcome and cost-effectiveness points of view. ABLES Adult Literacy Scheme in Cork City came third at this year's awards with their proposal to set up a literacy tutor response unit for parents and children using mobile phones. They would provide instant homework support by having trained tutors on hand to respond to calls when parents are helping their children with maths homework.

The judges of the ACE Awards were Dr. Elizabeth McSkeane (Independent Consultant), Dr. Rob Mark (Queen's University), Eibhlin Carr (EBS) and Tina Byrne (NALA Research Officer).



Resources and new research

This section provides you with an overview of some of the latest resources for literacy and relevant new research. We hope you find them useful.



www.nala.ie

In response to your requests, we have rearranged www.nala.ie so that you can find resources and publications much easier and faster. On our site there is a section for students, which includes a handy map of VEC adult literacy services, online learning resources and an area to talk to other students.

There is also a section for tutors which includes resources on teaching and learning workbooks and guides; reading for pleasure and discussing; grammar; numeracy; reading and writing skills; ESOL; dictionaries; teaching resources; spelling; training and reference material; family literacy and posters and leaflets.

Policy makers and the public can learn about current literacy priorities and latest research.

www.makingcents.ie – New free financial education site



We recently launched a new online financial education resource in association with EBS. The resource called www.makingcents.ie is for anyone interested in learning more about money and financial matters. It brings together the financial resources developed by NALA and EBS so that they are more accessible by the general public and people with literacy difficulties. It also forms part of EBS and NALA's commitment to the Financial Regulator to develop and publish free resource materials aimed at supporting adults develop their financial literacy.

www.healthliteracy.ie



This site was developed by the Merck Sharpe & Dohme/NALA Health Literacy Initiative. It gives people health literacy information relevant to Ireland and links to related websites and articles of interest.

www.writeon.ie



This is an interactive web site to help people who want to improve their reading, writing and numbers skills. It allows you the freedom to study in private, at your own pace and in your own time and get a national qualification if you wish.

You can study words, numbers, learning to learn and technology. Your skills can be assessed across a number of areas and then you are given an individual learning plan to improve these areas. At the end of the learning phase, users have the opportunity to have their skills assessed and request a national qualification. This is the first time that accreditation at this level has been offered in Ireland using the Internet.

[New NALA E-zine](#)

Some of you will have read our new e-zine, an electronic magazine that we send twice each month. It gives you short updates on our work, special membership offers, information on forthcoming events and new publications. Those of you with email addresses will have received it.

We see that over a 100 of our 500 plus members to date haven't got an email address, or at least we don't have one for you. If you are one of these take the plunge and set an account up for yourself and ring Eilis Mernagh with your address. Her number is 01 850 9102.

Facebook



Check out our Facebook where you can see pictures of our members, adult literacy students, tutors, adult literacy organisers, NALA executive and staff members, past chairs, Department of Education and Skills representatives, some of our corporate sponsors and many more!

We also give weekly updates on activities, including details of forthcoming events, audience viewing figures on 'Stuck for Words', our new TV programme and much more besides.

Facebook can dramatically increase support and awareness for adult literacy issues. We challenge you to log onto our Facebook and start chatting and sharing information about resources, student and tutors events, new research, conferences. The list is long.

We will also be developing blogs on different topics on literacy and will let you know when they go live.

Resources for adult literacy students and tutors

Buy online or from our resource room

We have an exciting range of books and other resources available to buy online at www.nala.ie under publications or direct from our resource room. Our resource room is open to all groups and individuals interested in viewing and buying literacy materials.

The materials stocked have been evaluated for their usefulness in helping people develop their reading, writing and number skills. Literacy tutors and trainers can choose what is most appropriate for learners' needs. Each entry has been judged appropriate for adult learners who are starting at different points in their development of reading, writing, spelling and number skills. Training material for tutors and trainers is also available.

Materials include books and CDs covering a wide range of areas including:

- reading for pleasure and discussion
- dictionaries
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- family literacy
- grammar
- numeracy
- reading and writing skills
- spelling
- software packages
- training and reference.

We cater for all levels of adult literacy learners.

We have an exciting range of new Beginner Readers which can be purchased in our Resource Room. Their format is clear and uncluttered. Each page has large print and a clear layout. High grade paper is used so there is no show-through to distract a dyslexic or beginner reader. The language is familiar and the text is line-broken, so that each sentence is broken down into short lines of sense. Books sell at a cost of €5.40 each. Here are some examples of stories:



MY MOTHER by Thomas Cambell

This is a heartfelt piece of writing, well supported by the excellent graphics. It tells how the author's violent father bullied and abused his family, especially his mother. It is a sad and thought-provoking story.



THE KIT KAT by Charmaine Marrochia

Amusing adult reader based on a true story. Two friends have to share a table with an old man in a cafe because it's so crowded. They're having a coffee and a KitKat and can't believe their eyes when the old man eats a piece of their biscuit.



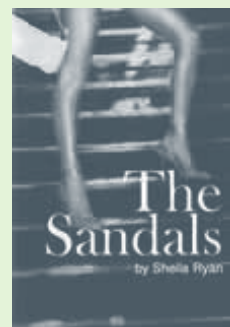
MY LIFE WITH JOE by Margaret Taylor

Short autobiography about how the author was bullied at school and how years later she returned to education and gained self-confidence. Basic adult reading book black and white drawings 25 words to the page.



THE EYES HAVE IT by Graham McNicol

This is a short story about love. Jess waits at home each day for Jenny to return from work. It's only at the end of the story that the author reveals Jess is a great dane.



THE SANDALS by Sheila Ryan

An invitation to a wedding goes horribly wrong. A beautifully written and stunningly illustrated comic story, simple enough for a beginner reader to enjoy on a first reading.

Dublin Office: You are most welcome to visit our Resource Room to view order and purchase materials. (By appointment only). Opening hours: Mondays to Friday (9.30 a.m. – 4.30 p.m.)

Orders and enquiries can also be made as follows:

By Post: NALA, 76 Lower Gardiner Street, Dublin 1
By Phone: Ring (01) 855 4332
By Fax: Dial (01) 855 5475
By e-mail: resources@nala.ie

You can view or purchase our materials online at www.nala.ie under Publications and resources. An Order Form can be forwarded by request if you email speel@nala.ie

Our small specialist library for academics, practitioners and college and other students

The NALA library is in our Dublin office at 76 Lower Gardiner Street, Dublin 1. Literacy students and tutors may use the library by appointment. The library contains approximately 7,000 resources made up of books, reports, periodicals, teaching materials, CD's, DVD's and other publications. All of these are catalogued on an electronic database.



Resources at
Dublin City
Central Library

Other resources

Dublin's City Central Library has new resources

Dublin's City Central Library has new resources for literacy tutors and students. These publications include a range of recommended reading material related to adult literacy theory and practice, and are aimed at students and those who work in the adult literacy sector, and in particular those completing the NALA/Waterford Institute of Technology's distance education programme.

For tutors the library has:

Literacy teaching material – This includes recommended reading material related to adult literacy theory (such as Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Meek's On Being Literate) and practice. All material is available to borrow but reference copies are also available to consult in the library.

For students it has:

Quick Reads – these are specially written books, both original works and adapted classics suited to specific reading levels. More on Quick Reads below.

Literacy learning aids – there are various learning aids available, including visual media, learner workbooks, and beginners' computer guides.

Also of interest in the Central library are:

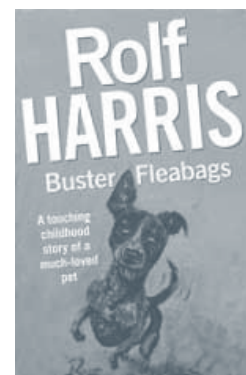
Audio books, large print books, DVDs and Videos and TV programmes that can be borrowed, for up to a week.

You can also book up to 55 minutes per day of Internet access and or avail of the music library – which offers a wide range of music CDs and DVDs for borrowing. And if that wasn't enough the library boasts an **Open Learning** opportunity on how to use computers including keyboard skills.

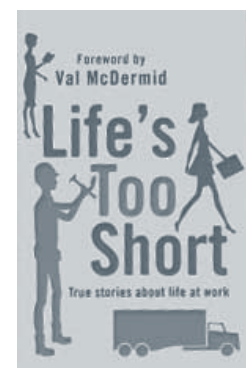
Further information from Aisling Murray or Padraic Stack, Central Library, Ilac Centre, Henry Street, Dublin 1 Centrallibrary@dublincity.ie Tel: 01 8734333

Quick Reads celebrate five years working with adult literacy

Quick Reads are short, fast-paced books by bestselling authors and celebrities written to literacy guidelines making them ideal resources for those working with emergent readers. Covering fiction and non-fiction there are books to suit everyone. This year's list includes titles by Cathy Kelly, Peter James, Rolf Harris and Alvin Hall.



Quick Reads have been widely used in literacy courses in colleges and community centres, libraries, prisons and workplaces. They are useful for adult literacy students, people with dyslexia, those undergoing rehabilitation or recovering from illness, older people, and people learning English as an additional language.



In Ireland Quick Reads work alongside the Open Door series of books for emergent readers.

To find out what Quick Reads can do for you and to order your FREE promotional pack, register at www.quickreads.org.uk. Or email quickreads@niace.org.uk. Or call 0116 204 7072.



The Open Door Series

The Open Door Series consists of thirty-seven original or adapted works from some of Ireland's bestselling authors who are also known internationally and have sold millions of books between them. These short novels have been specially designed to help improve adult literacy, reading skills and the English language. Lively paperbacks with about 300 words per page and large print text. The goal is to promote the joy of reading so that the students will go on to read the author's full length novels. This strategy is working with adult education providers. *Open Door* books will be a step forward for you so that reading becomes a lasting pleasure in your life.



Research

We use our research to improve adult literacy work in centres, services and nationally.

Our most recent research studies are:

At home with literacy: A study of family literacy practices



Just published in May this report details the findings from a research study that sought to develop adult and children's literacy through understanding and supporting family literacy practices in the home.

This is a community-based study, located in four areas throughout the country, an inner-city area, a suburban area, a small rural town and a large rural town and involving 41 families. The research shows that there are a variety of literacy practices that families engage in on a daily and weekly basis and that unsurprisingly technology usage and texting are increasingly popular in communication, written, read and spoken.

WoLLNET – New research to measure the impact of basic education and training in the workplace

NALA was an advisory partner on an EU project that involves partners from the UK, Germany, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Romania and Austria. The WoLLNET project

aimed to develop a toolkit which employers across Europe can adapt and use to measure the impact of basic education and training on the workplace. It is hoped that if employers are able to see the impact of basic education and training on organisational performance they would be more likely to invest in it. To see this report go to http://www.wollnet.org/results_en.htm

Watch out for The Fingal whole-organisation report

Coming soon is The Fingal whole-organisation project. It is a research study which was conducted on behalf of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) between December 2008 and September 2009. The project set out to explore the process of developing a whole-organisation approach to supporting literacy in a community-based organisation.

Other research

New study on the retail and wholesale sector highlights the importance of skills development



The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs recently launched their new research on the retail and wholesale sector. The study showed that while the educational attainment

profile of the sector is below that for the economy as a whole, it has improved rapidly.

An interesting trend highlighted in the report was that as with many other jobs affected by automation, "factors such as multi-skilling, effective teamwork, initiative, good communication skills, an understanding of quality, basic technological literacy and the ability to follow instructions and undertake diverse simple tasks accurately and intelligently have become more important." It goes on to say that "as generic skills such as these tend to improve with education and training, those who are better educated are likely to be more productive." (page 65) This supports NALA's ongoing work to raise awareness of the ever increasing use of literacy and numeracy in today's world and the priority focus of upskilling adults with less than a FETAC level 4 qualification.

If you want to check out the full report go to <http://www.forfas.ie/>

Study highlights many new findings relating to early school leaving

The most comprehensive study to date of the processes shaping early school leaving in Ireland has just been published called 'No Way Back?'. This ESRI study reports the grim finding that one in six students are leaving school before the Leaving Certificate. This finding has very significant implications for the education sector at all levels, including adult literacy learning.

Read the full report at <http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/13003/1/ESRIearlyschool.pdf>

News from the ground:

Students, tutors and adult literacy organisers

This section gives you a chance to read about the 2010 student development days, the national tutor's forum and the national adult literacy organiser's forum. These are important events for all participants as they facilitate meeting others and sharing knowledge and understanding of literacy issues.



Students exercising their vote

NALA Student Days, 2010

This year we held two student days, one in Dublin and one in Cork. The theme was voter education. The majority of students (97%) told us that they enjoyed the day. They thought the information received was very useful, speakers and workshops were interesting and that the day was well organised.

The morning speakers focused on what voting in Ireland means today and the 'how to' of voting. The afternoon workshops included a mock election, an update on literacy developments from NALA and next steps with learning from the Adult Education and Guidance Initiative.



NALA Student Day in Dublin



NALA Student Day in Cork

Speakers at the Dublin student day were:

- Dr. Elaine Byrne from the Politics Department in Trinity and the Irish Times;
- Bernadette Mc Mahon from the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice; and,
- Ernie Sweeney, adult literacy student who successfully campaigned to put candidate pictures on ballot papers.

In Cork the speakers were:

- Dr. Clodagh Harris, Department of Government in University College Cork; and,
- Maura Mc Namara, East Cork VEC tutor and student support person

Our Student Sub-committee helped at each event. In Cork the immigrant support group NASC also facilitated a workshop on voting.

Students from 11 counties came to the student days

165 students from 11 counties attended (Dublin, Meath, Cavan, Westmeath, Kilkenny, Waterford, South Tipperary, Cork, Kerry, Clare and Louth). This was double 2009 figures though similar to the number of students who came to our days in 2008 (179 students).

Most students who attended were involved in group tuition (75%) ; 15% were working with a tutor on a one-to-one basis; 3% were independent learners. 3% of learners were involved in one-to-one and group tuition; and, 4% no information available.

What students learned

Students said that after the day they had:

1. a better understanding about registering and how to vote;
2. knew more about NALA; and,
3. were more aware of the questions that matter to them and the importance of their issues.

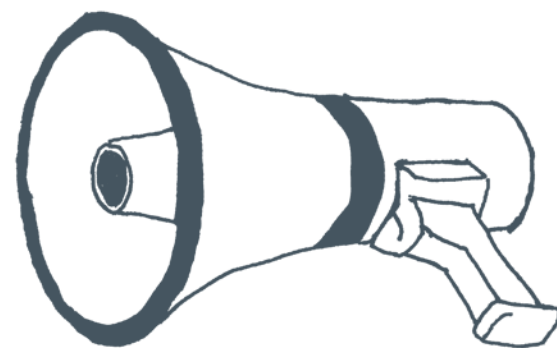
Other feedback from students to NALA

1. Voting should be made easier for people with literacy difficulties and for people with special needs.
2. NALA should keep working to promote plain English.
3. NALA should remember that not all learners speak English.
4. More ordinary people should go out to the community and talk about what NALA means and does for the public.
5. Student Days could cover more about how to improve literacy and maths and the skills needed to find a job.

In the coming months our Student Sub-Committee will be evaluating the longer term impact of our student days. They will be basing their findings on a sample survey of students who attended. Our next edition will include a feature on our Sub-Committee which will also give the findings of this impact study.

Tutors National Forum

By Priscilla Fitzpatrick, Adult Literacy Tutor,
Ringsend Adult Literacy Service



The National Forum for Adult Literacy Tutors took place this year in All Hallows College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9, on Saturday, 30th January 2010. 160 tutors attended. Jenny Derbyshire from NALA welcomed us and gave an overview of the day. The theme was: Developing curriculum with students in adult literacy. The panel of speakers included: John Stewart (NALA), Blathnaid Ní Chinnéide (NALA), Andrew Millum, a student and Breda Tormey, a tutor (KLEAR, City of Dublin VEC), Kieran Harrington (ALO, City of Galway VEC) and Anne Looney (Chief Executive NCCA).

John Stewart outlined a number of NALA's key achievements in 2009, including successfully lobbying the government for Ireland's involvement in the next international OECD adult literacy survey, Performance Indicators for the Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), due to happen in 2011, to name just one.

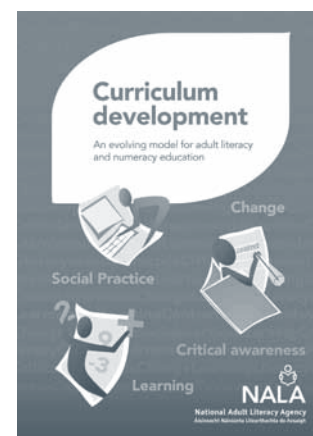
Blathnaid Ní Chinnéide introduced the latest NALA publication, Curriculum development: An evolving model for adult literacy and numeracy education. This is a companion book for the revised edition of Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work published in 2005. Curriculum development in adult literacy is a participative, student-centred and student-directed process that is based on an active and equal learning relationship. This dynamic model uses a social practice approach with elements that interact with, influence and change each other.

Breda and Andrew gave a very informative and encouraging presentation on their approach to curriculum development. They have a warm, friendly relationship based on equality and mutual respect. It was inspiring to hear how, from tentative beginnings, Andrew has now enrolled in a Further Education course and plans to follow a career in youth work.

Kieran Harrington gave a very challenging presentation on valuing learners' language and understanding different literacies. He made the case for a social practice approach which accepts vernacular language as a legitimate means of speaking and writing where activities are based on everyday tasks, materials are authentic and the link between vernacular language and formal 'school' English is only gradually forged. Much of this may seem very similar to the student-centred approach that tutors have always used. However, one of the main aspects of a social practice approach is the emphases it places on critical reflection. This encourages students to critically think about and question what they are hearing and reading, to explore the relationships between the people who create the texts and those who use them and to examine the value placed on the text and who decides this value.

Anne Looney gave a very lively and interesting talk on curriculum development in schools. She outlined a number of curriculum development initiatives including the Key Skills Framework for senior cycle students. This learner-centred initiative gives students the space and the language to talk about their own learning, in sharp contrast to the traditional model of school learning. There is also a new framework for learning for children in the 0 to 6 age range. It is called Aistear, a journey. This is the first national curriculum framework for very young children. It is child-centred and designed as a process to help children become competent and confident learners. Ann said that the idea of curriculum development as a process has been borrowed from NALA.

The morning ended with a short question and answer session.



Review of the Adult Literacy Organiser's (ALOs) Forum 2010

by Colin Cummins, Adult Literacy Organiser, Limerick City

Athlone provided the setting for the 2010 Adult Literacy Organisers' Forum where amidst unseasonably pleasant sunshine the focus was on "The Adult literacy service in a changing landscape". As Ireland deals with its current economic crisis it was perhaps timely that this year's forum looked at the economic and demographic influences that affect adult literacy provision today.



Participants at this year ALOs Forum

Day 1

Opening remarks: Inez Bailey, Director NALA

In her opening remarks Inez Bailey, Director of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), pointed to the fact that Ireland is among the OECD countries that globally have experienced the highest levels of unemployment rise over the last number of years. She referred to studies which show that while a country may fall abruptly into recession, a return to economic growth and renewed development can take anything from 8-10 years. If we consider that in Ireland today unemployment is particularly high amongst those with no qualifications then the role for literacy services becomes clear in the process of recovery.

Profiling and Case Management: Barry Kennedy, Regional Manager for the Department of Social Protection

In what proved to be one of the key inputs at the forum this year, Barry Kennedy, Regional Manager Department of Social Protection (DSP), introduced participants to an approach to profiling and case management that identifies potential for long-term unemployment amongst individuals. For DSP, profiling is a "systematic approach to early identification of individuals with high risk of becoming long-term unemployed." Early identification

of individuals at risk offers the potential for early and appropriate intervention and the potential to reduce the individual's time spent on the live register. Importantly, effective profiling may help prevent the likelihood of an individual experiencing economic, social and psychological problems while decreasing the risk of future long-term unemployment.

Significantly, profiling efforts under taken in a pilot scheme in the Galway region produced results of interest to anyone involved in basic education and adult literacy provision. Perhaps of greatest interest to the ALOs present was the finding that the probability of staying on the live register was proven statistically to be greatly influenced by whether or not the person experienced significant literacy and numeracy difficulties.

Opportunity clearly exists for referral as part of the profiling efforts undertaken by DSP as the model is highly successful.

Meeting new Career Challenges: Sheila Holland-Fox, Tuam Adult Learning Centre

Following on from the presentation from Mr. Kennedy, Shelia Holland Fox, ALO from Tuam Adult Learning Centre, outlined some approaches taken there in dealing with individuals who have recently been made redundant. In Tuam a programme was developed that

focused on meeting the new career challenges for those moving from redundancy back into education, particularly where participants have been employed in labour intensive areas over many years. In the Tuam example, the programme was developed in consultation with the participants and focused on computer literacy, preparation for work and career information.

Identifying known Barriers to Participation in Adult Literacy: Tina Byrne, Research Officer NALA

Tina Byrne gave an informative presentation to participants on the known barriers to participation in adult literacy tuition. The session provided an overview of international and Irish research and focused on two empirical studies; one with older people and one with men. What was interesting, was the opportunity to reflect on the barriers to literacy development in the context of Irish research. In particular it was interesting to consider the messages coming from the 2008 Literacy Returns which identified a number of key factors. For example, 70% of all learners nationally are under 45 years of age while 60% of the learner population is comprised of women. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the context, more learners are likely to be unemployed now than in previous years.

Level 2 and 3 Programme and Processes: Orla Lynch FETAC

It is clear that in a changing economic climate the issue of recognition for learning comes into focus. Orla Lynch, from FETAC delivered a briefing to the group on developments in the roll out of FETAC awards in general skills areas at levels 2 and 3. Awards at these levels will be critical into the future, particularly as part of efforts to meet Ireland's future skills needs. Providing a spectrum for the recognition for learning at all levels will help ensure progression for learners also.

The day ended with workshops.

Day 2

The Challenges for Adult Literacy Provision: Rina McKenna

"Where we are and where we want to be – the challenges for adult literacy provision" was the theme of the opening remarks on day two from Rina McKenna AEO of the host VEC. Talking delegates through "Grow it, cook it, eat it!", a programme developed in cooperation with FAS and DSFP in Athlone, Ms McKenna asked those present to consider how we may move from the at times disabling public perceptions of literacy and basic education, i.e. often viewed as "a bit embarrassing", to provision that is identified by FETAC level or by subject all of which is integrated into a wider spectrum of adult and further education.

Intensive Literacy - its value and benefits: Terry McCann, Adult Education Organiser, Co Dublin VEC

In his presentation, Mr McCann presented a case for how intensive literacy may provide a mechanism for accelerated learning and progression up, across and out of adult literacy services. In what was an engaging presentation, Mr McCann asked delegates to reflect on the key features, or the "concentrated formula", of intensive literacy and how in our changing economic environment this model provides added value for learners. By "adding value" to the literacy programmes offered by adult literacy services we will help ensure learners see our provision as relevant given our changing context and an increasingly competitive employment market.

Tailored Workplace Learning Programmes – an Example: Margot Walsh, Workplace Basic Education (WBE) Coordinator, Co Clare

Margot Walsh outlined how increasing regulation has provided a new opportunity to engage learners in workplace environments. She described two programmes where a focus on "regulations learning" has provided opportunity to boost employability prospects for adults with basic education needs and in doing so provide a real chance for those adults to compete in the emerging workplace environments. The two projects discussed at the forum centred on exam preparation for Taxi drivers (SPSV Exams) and a "Signage, Lighting and Guarding" exam preparation course for council workers.

Skills for the Future – A Medium Term Perspective: Jasmina Behan, Senior Research Officer, FÁS

In considering how adult literacy services respond to our changing economic and demographic climate, knowing or predicting the future skills needs is a vital piece of information for services to have at their disposal. Jasmine Behan, Senior Research Officer with FÁS, introduced the audience to the findings of the Occupational Employment Forecasts 2015 report – the 13th in a series of reports from FÁS and the ESRI. The report, which hopes to inform educational policy makers and providers, presents employment forecasts for 43 occupational groups looking particularly at gender and educational influences.

Ireland over the coming years will swing significantly away from growth in core areas of employment in areas such as skilled labour, agriculture, sales and clerical to growth in areas such as management, personal services and professional services. The trend indicated by the forecasts suggests that this swing in growth will potentially lead to a new long-term unemployed population with characteristics different to previous years i.e. in the past long term unemployment was often directly linked to socio-economic disadvantage whereas future trends would suggest many who would have been deemed skilled in the past may have little opportunity to find employment in the medium term. This prediction is of significant importance to adult literacy providers who may likely provide the first step in a return to education and re-skilling for many people in this emerging long-term unemployed population.

Adult Literacy Services – Challenges and future developments: Fiona Hartley CEO Co Wicklow VEC/Chair of Adult Literacy Forum

In the final presentation of the forum, Fiona Hartley, looked at the response of adult literacy services to the current and emerging economic climate, our present challenges and potential future developments. The context for literacy services is changing and may involve the aggregation of VECs along with an increased demand for new and different services. As a result it is clear that adult literacy services need to continue to actively pursue an agenda for the development of a professional service that meets the real and future needs of learners. In looking at the challenges, Ms Hartley echoed the thoughts of many of the other contributors at the forum in focusing on the questions of "how we reach adults with basic education needs; what we offer our learners; and how we know we are effective?" In answering these questions, Ms Hartley focused on a number of key areas including curriculum (targeted initiatives in particular), tutor professionalisation (qualifications, career development and specialist professional development) and quality assurance (particularly FETAC and the integration of Quality Assurance efforts with other quality assurance frameworks).

The role of adult literacy services within the context of the wider adult education service was also considered in the presentation as part of an exploration of potential models for future service delivery. A process approach encompassing change management is required. In the emerging context it is apparent that intra-agency and inter-agency collaboration will be critical. As a result the direct implication for adult literacy services focuses on a review of the aims and remit of services (direct provision versus support). In maintaining the ethos of adult literacy we need to revisit the values that underpin our work.

Following a lively questions and answers session Ms Rina McKenna brought the 2010 Adult Literacy Forum to a close.

A note on NALA's next Strategic Plan

As the national organisation charged with ensuring that literacy is a top political priority, we have a responsibility for representing adult literacy students and giving informed advice and leadership on literacy to this country.



With this in mind we are reviewing our progress on our current plan with a view to having our new one prepared for November. We are gathering information from learners, tutors, other practitioners and educationalists, policy makers, academics, business people and our staff on what we are doing well, where we need to improve and what needs to be our priorities looking at 2011 and beyond.

Over the summer and autumn a specialist working group made up of NALA staff and Executive members,

and facilitated by external consultant Caroline McCamley, will be working to examine stakeholders' views and determine what is the best way forward. We know the risks. We need to learn more about the opportunities.

In September, we will send you a copy of our next draft Strategic plan. We will need your feedback. Thanks to those of you who gave feedback on the review stage of our plan. We look forward to hearing from you and others again in September. Keep an eye on our website www.nala.ie for updates in between.

In our next edition...

We hope you enjoyed this edition of Literacy Matters. In our next edition we will have articles on:

Bride Daly, a literacy student's trip to a Brussels Conference on literacy

Social Networking and its relevance to literacy

NALA Student Sub-Committee Work, including an impact study of our two student days

Would you like to see anything else in the next edition? If so, please submit articles or letters to Claire O'Riordan before August 31st, 2010.

Dates for your diary

8th September

International Literacy Day Conference, Royal Hospital, Kilmainham

September

National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2010
Ploughing Championships

16th September

One day plain English course, Dublin

21st October

One day plain English course, Cork

October

Launch of Merck Sharpe & Dohme health literacy research

25th November

One day plain English course, Dublin



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

Special Membership Offer

Spread the word about NALA Membership!

Did you know being a member entitles you to 50% off our conferences and events, 25% off our publications and 10% off Irish publications in our resource room? We also have an offer for new members joining in groups of 10. Usually, each person pays €25 to join but if you join with nine others, each person only pays €15, a saving of €10 each. Can you think of anyone who may wish to join NALA?

We appreciate you showing your support for adult literacy in Ireland by being a member of NALA. If you can think of anyone who may wish to join, ring our freephone 1800 20 20 65 or log onto www.nala.ie

Special membership offer

NALA Membership is from 1 January to 31 December each year. We **now have a special offer**. You can join now and become a member for the remaining part of 2010 and for all of 2011. The rates for this offer are:

Individual members:

Individual member	€25
Unwaged individual member	€5
Discounted rate for 10 or more individuals joining together	€15 per person
Associate and overseas individual members*	€50

Group members:

Statutory and corporate organisations	€300
Non-profit organisations	€100
Local literacy centres	€50
Associate and overseas organisations*	€150

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)

The National Adult Literacy Agency is an independent membership organisation, committed to making sure people with literacy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs.

National Adult Literacy Agency
76 Lower Gardiner Street,
Dublin 1.

01 855 4332
literacy@nala.ie

For more information about becoming a member of NALA call our freephone 1800 20 20 65 or log onto www.nala.ie