

Literacy Matters

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



Sometimes it's
the little everyday
things in life...



New Campaign

Read about our new campaign to raise awareness of the benefits of improving your reading, writing and maths skills.

Also:

- We talk to people at Drogheda Adult Learning Service
- Find out about the latest review of adult literacy provision
- New literacy grant available

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Welcome

In this edition of Literacy Matters we bring you lots of literacy news from around the country. Starting with a special on Louth Adult Learning Service there is an article about two students from Drogheda who have become firm friends since returning to education. There is also an interview with Adult Literacy Organiser, Maria Morgan. Maria started working as a tutor 15 years ago and has seen many changes over the years, including the growth in the service from 40 to over a 1,000 learners.

We are also delighted to bring you news of our new campaign to raise awareness of the literacy services. Focusing on how sometimes it's the small everyday things in life that can become problematic, like texting or reading instructions, we hope to encourage people to give adult education a go by contacting their local ETB or NALA.

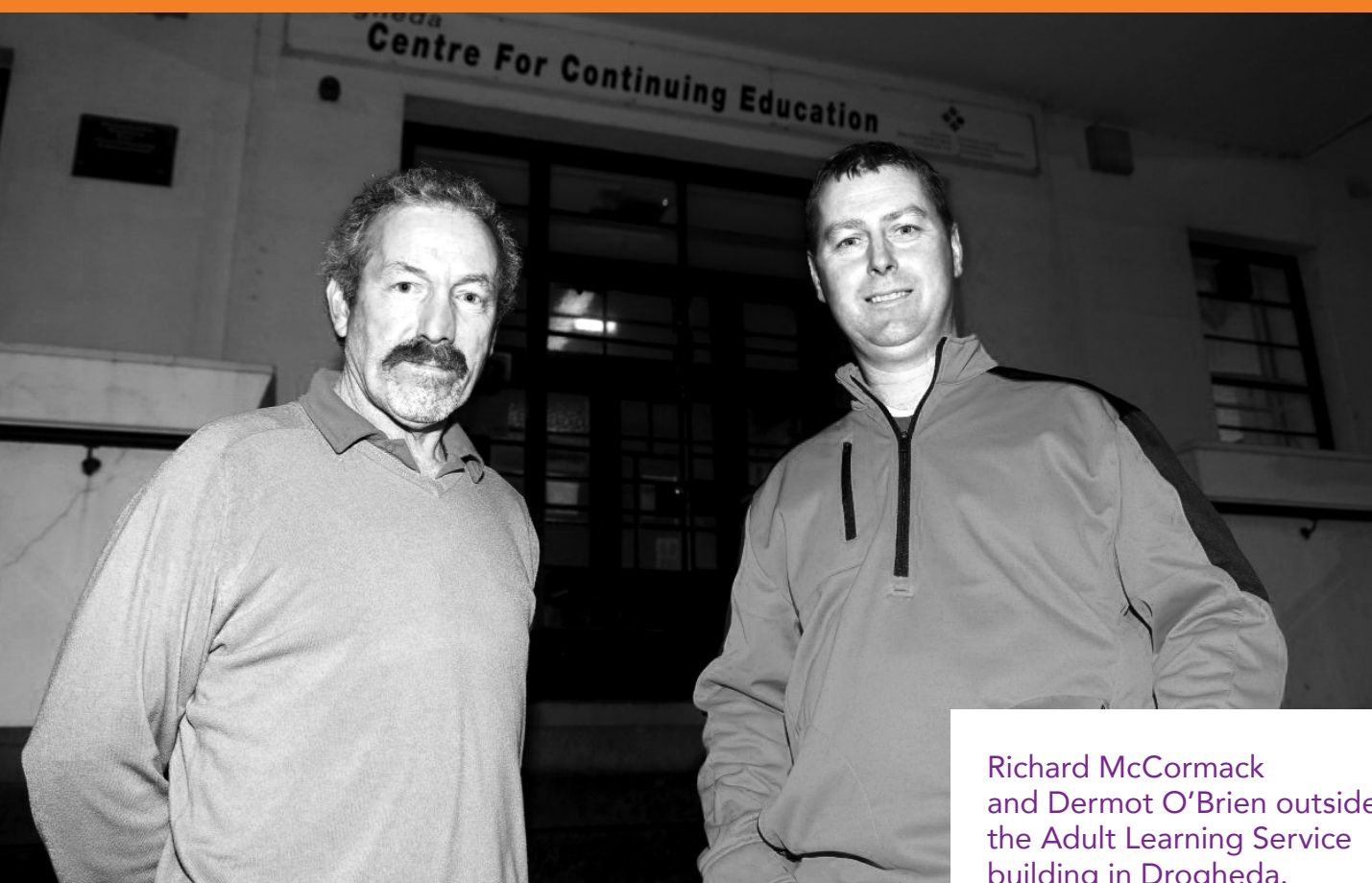
With the European elections nearly upon us, we have included information on what's happening and how to vote – we hope students and tutors find this useful. There is also information on a new Better World Book grant, our new TV series, numeracy research and developments in plain English.

We hope you enjoy reading these and other articles.

On a final note, you may know that there has been a lot happening recently to make Further Education and Training (FET) more inclusive of people with literacy difficulties. One major milestone for us was getting into legislation that SOLAS develop an adult literacy and numeracy strategy. We and many others in the sector were fully engaged in the process to create the FET strategy. The draft Strategy was sent to the Minister for Education and Skills at the end of March and is expected to be launched shortly. We will continue to keep you up to date with developments.

In the meantime, we would love to hear from you if you have any questions or suggestions for our next edition of Literacy Matters. Simply email info@nala.ie.

From all the team in NALA.



Richard McCormack and Dermot O'Brien outside the Adult Learning Service building in Drogheda.

A mature step

Adult learners get new lease of life by returning to education.

It was a life changing decision for Dermot O'Brien and Richard McCormack when they stepped through the doors of the County Louth Adult Learning service on King Street in Drogheda to give adult education a chance.

The two men, who have struck up a firm friendship, are encouraging others to follow their lead and get help if they have a problem reading, writing or spelling. Richard and Dermot met in their English group two years ago and clicked over their struggles with spelling and writing. They have been a source of support to each other since.

County Louth Adult Learning service is a free and confidential service for people who

wish to improve their literacy, numeracy or language skills. It is run under the auspices of Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB) formerly known as Louth VEC.

Dermot O'Brien (38) is married and has two children. He is from Duleek and initially came back to education to improve his confidence and to help his children with their homework. He is a truck driver.

"It was something that always played at the back of my mind. My children started asking me to help them with their homework and I was not able to and was frustrated. I have noticed terrific improvements since starting the classes and it has filled me with



Dermot makes great use of technology to help him improve his literacy, having downloaded an app on his phone to check his spelling. He also downloads audio books from the local library on a regular basis.

confidence. It's not like being at school and I have made some great friends through taking part. I was embarrassed at first but you soon realise that it is nothing to be ashamed of and nobody is going to judge you," he said.

He is currently working towards gaining FETAC accreditation Level 3 in Communications but wants to do his Junior and Leaving Cert in due course.

Richard McCormack (58) is married with four children and is from Killineer. He is self employed and does extensions and renovations. When doing a job he would get his wife to write out the details for him. Since doing the course he has been able to do this himself and has felt his confidence soaring.

"I suffer from depression and it can be difficult. One of the things that always got me down was my difficulty with reading and writing. I heard about the service and decided to do something about it three years ago. I have noticed a huge improvement and it has made such a difference to my life," he said. Richard is currently working towards gaining a FETAC Level 3 certificate in Maths and is hoping to sit his Junior Cert English in June 2014.

This article was written by Ian Watter and it appeared in the Drogheda Leader in February.

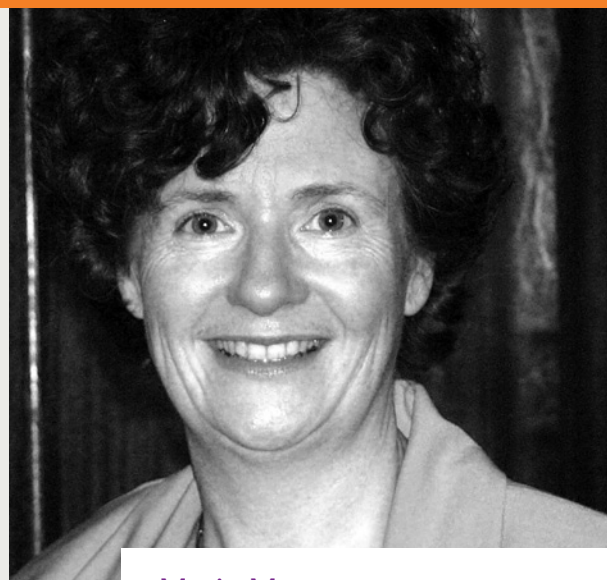
Spreading the word

Dermot was inspired hearing his fellow classmates talking on local radio about their experiences of returning to education. It spurred him on to write a letter to the Ray D'arcy Show about his own positive experience. Dermot is a huge fan of the Ray D'arcy show and he listens to it every day while driving his lorry. Dermot's letter was read out on air by Ray and it received a great response by listeners of the show.

Since then, Dermot has done a TV interview on RTÉ's Morning Edition with Keelin Shanley. In January, Richard joined Dermot for a half hour interview with Seán O'Rourke on RTÉ Radio One and judging by the increase in calls to the NALA Freephone, listeners really related to their story.



Getting away from chalk and talk



Maria Morgan,
Adult Literacy Organiser,
Drogheda.

Maria Morgan started working with the Adult Learning Service in Drogheda 15 years ago, in 1999. Back then, there were only 42 learners. Now there are over 1,100 learners using the service every year with about 25 group tutors and 55 volunteer tutors. During this time there have been many changes and Maria says she loves it as much now as she did when she first started.

What are the biggest changes you have seen over the years?

When I started there was only one-to-one tuition. It took place in the homes of either the tutor or the learner so the introduction of group tuition combined with moving the service to the Adult Education centre was a significant change.

The next big change was when we started to offer English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) to non-native learners. I think it has brought richness to the centre and is now an integral part of what we offer in the Adult Learning Service.

But I think the biggest change for me is the willingness of students to help in the publicity of the service. When I first started learners were very fearful of meeting someone they recognised and they felt a great stigma in having literacy difficulties. Now I have no difficulty recruiting students to speak on radio or having their photographs in the local papers.

Is there a typical student?

There is really no typical learner as everyone is an individual with their own needs and requirements. Most people lack confidence when they first come into the service especially in regard to their reading and writing skills. Spelling is a big issue for all the students and many of them have a great fear of maths. All the students underestimate their skills and when they start class they discover they know a lot more than they thought they did and this builds their confidence.

Have there been cutbacks?

Although there have been cutbacks in terms of budget to date we have been lucky enough in that it hasn't affected our ability to deliver a first class quality service to our learners.

Do you have any fears for the future of the service?

Maintaining a needs based service in a changing educational and training environment where accreditation and its importance has become a significant driver of provision is a concern. There is a big jump between FETAC Levels 2 and 3 and learners need the time and space in order to bridge that gap and I hope they are given sufficient time.

What has improved in your opinion over the years?

Literacy is now seen as an integral part of Adult Education which can only be good as it removes the stigma of having literacy or numeracy difficulties.

The teaching resources have also improved significantly over the years and there are more Irish resources like the Open Door Series and Read Write Now available.

What more could be done to support the service?

It is important for Adult Basic Education to keep a high profile with politicians and policy makers so that priority is given to levels 1, 2 and 3 because if people are experiencing difficulties at these levels they are least likely to be able to progress up the qualification framework.

What training have you received over the years and what was the best?

I completed the NALA WIT certificates in Literacy Development and Adult Education which gave me a theoretical framework for my work, as well as various in-service training with Co Louth VEC now LMETB.

Recently I attended Grundtvig training in Belfast on Coaching Skills to Support the Success of Adult Learners. I found this training excellent especially as I attended the training with six other participants all from different European countries so it was great to get the European dimension.

Do you have any top tips for tutors?

My top tip for a tutor is the importance of building up a good working relationship or group dynamic with your students. It is important for learners to feel comfortable with their tutor. The other tip is never set your student up for failure so when preparing or teaching take it step by step and by doing this it will build up the student's confidence.

Are there any styles or ways of teaching that you find work well?

I would always advocate tutors use a multi-sensory approach when it comes to teaching adults. The resources I would recommend are any of the AXIS publications or the AXIS 'Hands on' resources are really excellent.

Recently two of my resource workers Angela and Margaret attended Grundtvig training in Active Learning Methodologies in Literacy and Numeracy. This is where the learners are actively engaged in the learning process and feedback from tutors and students is very positive. It is getting away from the traditional chalk and talk.

Drogheda Adult Learning Service offers a wide range of programmes and accreditation options. See www.louthvec.ie for more information.



Reviewing Adult Literacy

In October 2013, The Department of Education and Skills (DES) published its Review of Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme (ALCES) funded Adult Literacy Provision.

The review evaluates the extent to which services delivered by VECs met the aims, objectives and targets of the ALCES funded schemes in 2012. It covered adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision.

The review:

- makes a series of recommendations on how to further develop and meet the current and future literacy needs of learners, employers and the Government;
- addresses the level and nature of literacy provision, recommending more intensive options, group tuition, numeracy tuition, family literacy as well as distance and blended learning options; and
- includes recommendations addressing areas such as assessment of learners and availability of accredited options as well as how to incorporate literacy provision within staff training.

“The review endorses many of NALA’s priorities including the integration of literacy and numeracy in Further Education and Training, more flexible provision, enhanced numeracy and family literacy provision, and the need for a more concerted approach to staffing and training within literacy services,” said John Stewart, National Coordinator, NALA.

As a first step, the Adult Literacy Operational Guidelines will be revised to include many of the review’s recommendations.

The recommendations also informed the work of SOLAS in the development of the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014-2019. This strategy will promote a systematic approach to literacy and numeracy provision through the Education and Training Boards over the next five years.

The Review contains 32 recommendations.

The following paragraphs provide you with a flavour of these recommendations

There should be a renewed emphasis on adults whose literacy and numeracy skills do not match Level 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Within this target group, priority should be given to unemployed adults and those adults with literacy levels 1 and 2 or those with only a primary education or less.

Adult Literacy programmes and employment service offices should agree relevant contact points to ensure easier access by unemployed people to appropriate literacy provision.

VECs should strongly promote numeracy as an option for Adult Literacy participants and try to increase participation in standalone and integrated numeracy options.

Given the positive outcomes associated with family literacy, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) should re-emphasise the potential to use mainstream Adult Literacy programme allocations to deliver family literacy programmes.

Access to distance and blended learning should be integrated into all service delivery, and these options should be promoted for all students in Adult Literacy programmes to increase access to learning opportunities. Therefore, every VEC should offer distance and blended learning options such as **www.writeon.ie** to students both as standalone and integrated into mainstream delivery.

It is recommended that the DES, in conjunction with the IVEA (representing VECs) and relevant stakeholders (NALA, Waterford Institute of Technology), develops a national approach and strategy to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) across the service so that priority areas for CPD delivery can be established and improve practice.

All VECs should develop formal volunteer protocols. The protocol should include appropriate criteria for the assignment of students to volunteers. The DES should consult with the IVEA (representing VECs) in relation to developing more detailed information on this topic as part of the Operational Guidelines.

The review was carried out by Mary Kett with Marian Lynch, County Dublin VEC, and was supported by a steering committee (including DES, NALA, AONTAS, IVEA, FÁS, and the professional associations of VEC Chief Executive Officers, Adult Education Officers and Adult Literacy Organisers).

The review selected key points from international literature, NALA research and policy papers. It also carried out a survey of VECs as well as site visits and met a small number of stakeholders. You can download the full report at **www.education.ie**



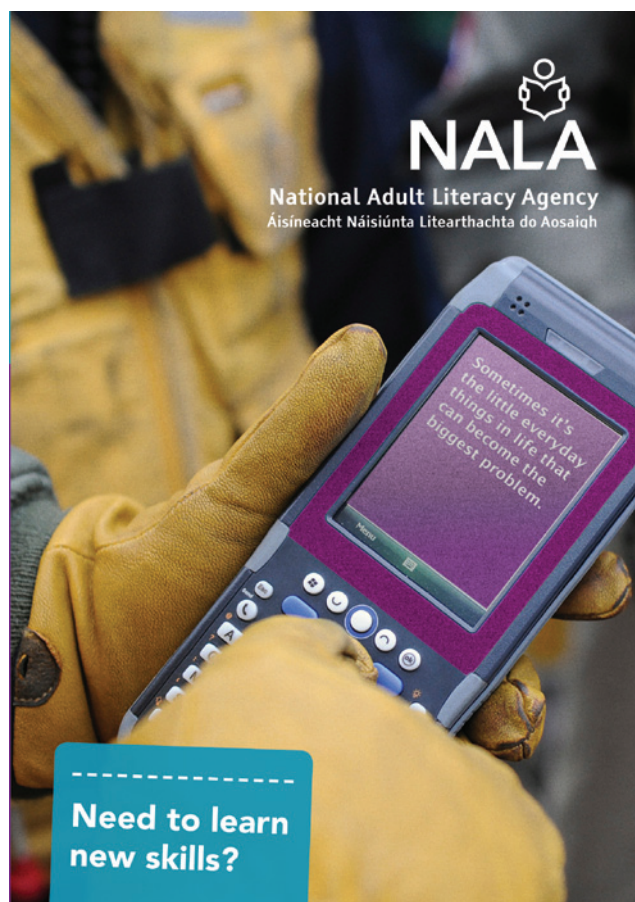
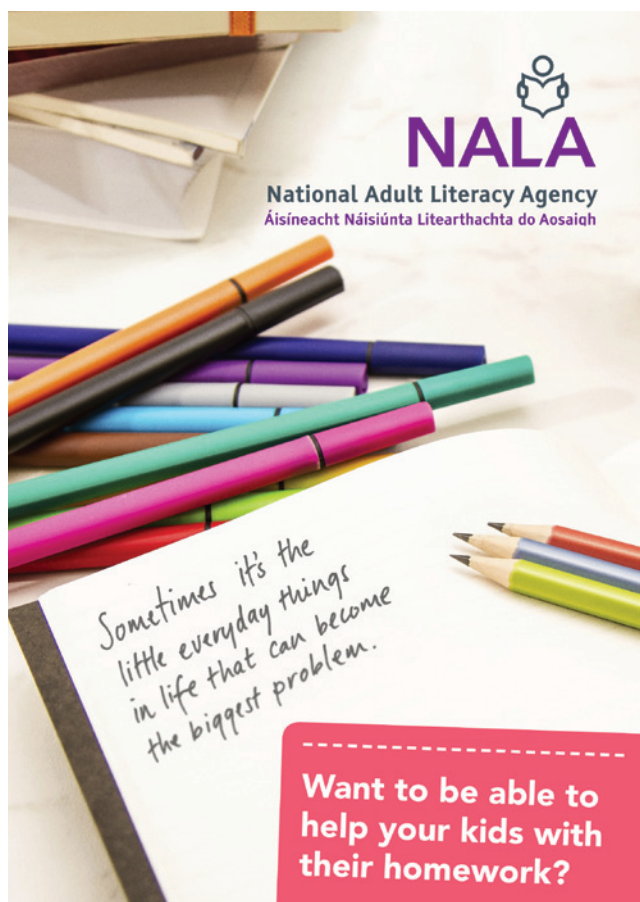
Sometimes it's the little everyday things in life...

Often when we talk to adult literacy students we hear how sometimes it's the little everyday things in life that can become the biggest problem.

Like reading the washing instructions on a jumper, checking a bill in a café with friends or writing a text.

So, we decided to develop a new campaign to focus on these everyday tasks and show how easy it is to get on top of these problems.

Our aim is to encourage people to 'have a go' at improving their basic skills and highlight all the great learning options available around Ireland.



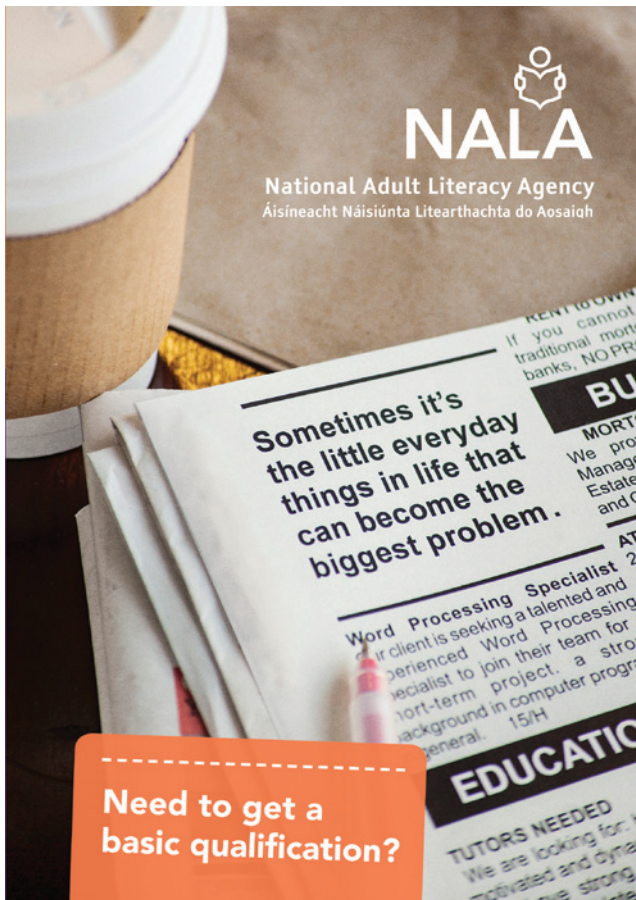


Call or text us. One of our friendly operators would be happy to talk to you. Or log onto our website **www.writeon.ie** and start learning today.

Can you help us promote the benefits of learning?

We will be distributing our leaflets in Citizen Information Centres, Social Welfare Offices and through other groups that can help us raise awareness with the public.

If you have an event or could help us distribute them locally, we would love to hear from you. Email **info@nala.ie**.



Need to get a basic qualification?

National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2014

National Adult Literacy Awareness Week 2014 will take place from the 22 - 26 September 2014.

Using the images from our new campaign, our theme this year will be **'Sometimes it's the little things in life that can become the biggest problem'.**

At a national level we will be attending the Ploughing Championships and doing media interviews, and An Post will be sponsoring TV advertising again.

We also plan to organise themed events to promote literacy awareness among policy makers and key stakeholders working with unemployed people, families and the health sector.

Similar to last year, we will make promotional material with local information available to all our members before the week.

If you have any suggestions we would be delighted to hear from you. Contact **media@nala.ie**.

Learner Ambassadors are ready to give talks

NALA is coordinating an EU funded Learner Ambassador Programme on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills.

Through this Programme, the EU is providing funding for students to get training in how to give talks so they can become a Learner Ambassador in their local community.

A Learner Ambassador is a student who went back to education as an adult and shares their story about the benefits of returning to education with small groups of people in their community. The aim is to encourage other people who might be interested in returning to education to contact their local ETB or Adult Education Centre.

"80 students have now completed general training and are currently getting further presentation skills training in their region. After this training we are asking students to inform the centre, where they went back to education, before arranging any talks. This is to make sure that all Education centres are happy that the student is a Learner Ambassador for their service," says Margaret Murray, Student Coordinator, NALA.

"If the centre is in agreement, it would be ideal if they could give the Learner Ambassador suggestions of names and contact details of groups they think would be good to talk to. They also should give the Learner Ambassador local referral details to share with people who are interested in going back to learning, for example their local ETB contact details."

"After this, all the Learner Ambassadors will be ready to give talks," says Margaret.

"The aim for the EU programme is that each student will give two talks to groups between now and September 2014. We hope the fact that students have gone through a training process means that students will have refined their skills in giving short talks. This, we trust, will be a good resource for all Education centres to have for other local promotional work as well," she said.

The European Agenda for Adult Learning in Ireland is being managed by the Department of Education and Skills and a Steering Committee which includes AONTAS (The National Adult Learning Organisation), ETBI (Education and Training Boards Ireland), NALA (The National Adult Literacy Agency), NCGE (The National Centre for Guidance in Education) and Léargas (the National Agency in Ireland for the management of European, national and international exchange and cooperation programmes).

If you would like to know more about the Learner Ambassador Programme contact **Margaret Murray on (01) 412 7928 or mmurray@nala.ie**.

Stars line up to take part in new TV series

A new, series of 'The Family Project' will soon hit our screens on RTÉ ONE.

John Spillane, Davy Fitzgerald and Brendan Courtney are just some of the well known personalities that are taking part in the new series of The Family Project.

Similar to last year, they will work alongside experienced tutors to support families who are struggling with some aspect of education in their lives, whether it's Mum having left school early, a child with a learning difficulty or simply the parents not knowing how to help with homework. They will work together to find a way to overcome the problem, bringing them closer as a family.

"We all know that learning is much more than doing homework and we want to empower families to do more. Each programme will focus on one family's story, the challenges they face and the techniques they learn to overcome these challenges," said Tom O'Mara, Distance Learning Officer, NALA.



In each episode, the featured family will work with a mentor who will guide and support them to complete a task tailored for them. The task will help the family work together to use and improve all areas of education, with emphasis on areas that the family find particularly problematic, for example, spellings or maths. This will be done in a fun way. There will be a team of experienced tutors on hand to provide tips and interesting techniques which the family can use in their day to day lives.

"The community will also play an important role in this process, providing support for each family and showcasing the learning resources that are available across the length and breadth of the country," said Tom.

We have no doubt that the series will both inspire and show families on how easy it is to enrich their lives by learning together.

The first episode is scheduled for Monday 26 May on RTE – see our monthly ezine for updates.

Working to support the training needs of numeracy tutors

Last year NALA in partnership with the Institute of Technology Tallaght (ITT) published the findings from a survey that identified the training needs of tutors providing numeracy tuition to adult learners.

Over 60% of tutors reported that they did not have enough training in teaching mathematics to adults and of these, 15% reported that they had no training at all in this area. This would seem to indicate that many tutors currently delivering adult numeracy in Ireland may not have had, or may not have availed of an opportunity to keep abreast of changes in numeracy that have been implemented over the period.

In addition, without dedicated continuous professional development (CPD) in adult mathematics education, tutors' teaching is mainly influenced by their own school experience. The age profile of adult numeracy tutors would suggest that this school experience would have developed an abstract, de-contextualised view of mathematics.

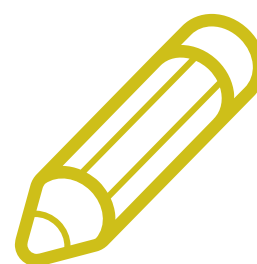
One of the key benefits of CPD is the opportunity it provides to tutors to share practice and experience with their peers. This is particularly important for numeracy tutors who frequently work fairly independently within centres. Tutors who had completed in-service training on adult mathematics education highlighted the positive impact this training had on their teaching practice.

Although tutors recognise the importance of developing a more profound understanding of elementary mathematics they favoured CPD that would provide the opportunity to build confidence in their teaching, to use a range of teaching approaches and to be able to develop resources to suit learners.

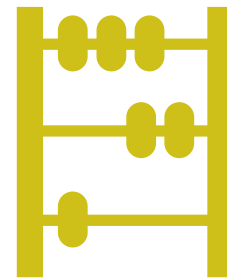
The majority of tutors expressed a preference for a CPD programme that is accredited, delivered part time and supported by technology. Tutors recognised the need to work towards a qualification for teaching adult numeracy. Tutors had a preference for CPD which would enable them to gain credits and help build towards a postgraduate teaching qualification.

"The improvement of the quality and quantity of adult numeracy teaching and learning is a key concern of NALA and the reason for conducting this research. It is very timely insofar as Ireland is going through the most extensive reform of further education and training in the history of the State, presenting a key opportunity to change and improve our practice," said Inez Bailey, Director, NALA.

"This research can make a significant contribution to informing the type of CPD that needs to be put in place to meet both the needs of the adult numeracy tutors and any future legislative requirement," said Inez.



The Department of Education and Skills draft operational guidelines 2013 state that numeracy should be a central part of the range of learning options offered throughout the ETB Adult Literacy programme and learners should be offered an opportunity to gain accreditation at NFQ levels 1-3.



The next step

The report recommended that NALA gather an expert group of relevant stakeholders to discuss a number of issues outlined in the report, primarily the CPD required by tutors as indicated by the research.

In late 2013 NALA invited members of SOLAS, ETBI, WIT, and leading numeracy consultants and academics to be part of this group. We were delighted that everyone accepted our invitation.

"The focus of the group is to discuss and propose actions to improve the kind of CPD required by numeracy tutors nationally. The group will explore ways to enhance the range of quality professional development provided to those involved in the delivery of adult numeracy, including NALA's programme for CPD and the NALA WIT numeracy programmes at NFQ Levels 6 and 7," said Tina Byrne, Research Officer, NALA.

"The first meeting of the Working Group took place at the end of January 2014. From the debate which will emanate from the working group, it is hoped we will see action on the continuous professional development of numeracy tutors, resulting in improved outcomes for adult learners," said Tina.

For more information on the Working Group please contact Tina Byrne, Research Officer, NALA on tbyrne@nala.ie

The full report 'Doing the maths: the training needs of numeracy tutors in Ireland and beyond' is available to download at www.nala.ie.



PIAAC results show that just over 25% of Irish adults score at or below Level 1 for numeracy compared to a 20% average across participating countries. (CSO, 2013)



The European elections 2014 are now at our doorstep.

The parliament is your power in Europe, so use it!

This May, you, along with nearly 400 million other Europeans, will elect the Members of the European Parliament.

Why vote?

In these European elections, voting will have greater impact than ever before.

- Set the direction of Europe. Big choices face us over the coming years. The political shape of the European Parliament will determine how those choices are made. And that depends on you.
- Choose who's in charge. For the first time, who becomes President of the European Commission depends on the elections. You get to say who you want to see in that job.
- Vote for impact. The European Parliament's decisions affect your daily life. Make sure you have a say in how those decisions will be taken. The Parliament is your power in Europe. Use your power!



Here's what is happening

The Lisbon Treaty, agreed on by all EU countries, means that the European Parliament, and thus the citizens it represents, now have far more power than when you last elected it.

Parliament now makes European law across the board. From regulating banks to international trade agreements; from food safety to data protection; from agricultural policy to environmental standards, Parliament makes the laws we live by.

But that's not all. Parliament also decides on the EU budget. Where should European money go? Where can it add most value? What are our priorities? These decisions depend on political choices. Ultimately, these choices are yours.

The Parliament also examines Europe's executive, the European Commission. Is it doing its job properly? Is it spending your money wisely?

And there's one more thing. For the first time, under the new rules, the presidency of the European Commission depends directly on the elections.

The leaders of European governments must take the results of the elections into account when they put forward the person they want to see become president of the European Commission. To get the job, the new President must be elected by the European Parliament, with the support of a political majority.

What to do next?

Have your say over how we face our common challenges, over who makes our laws, and over who decides how our money is spent. Choose who's in charge!

Get informed

- Want to find out what MEPs best represent you? Visit **www.myvote2014.eu**
- Want to find out more about the European Parliament in Ireland? Visit **www.euoparl.ie**
- Want to know all about the European elections? Visit **www.elections2014.eu**

Make sure you are registered to vote

In order to vote your name must be entered on the Register of Electors, which is compiled by your Local Authority. Visit **www.vote.ie** for more information. You check if you are registered here **www.checktheregister.ie**

Use your vote

- Go to your local polling station on Friday 23 May.
- Make sure to bring your voting card and some proof of identification with you, for example a passport.
- Show your voting card to an official person at the polling station and they will give you a ballot paper and tell you where to vote.
- On the ballot paper the candidates' surnames are listed in alphabetical order.
- Voting is straightforward. You write '1' in the space to the right of the photograph of your first choice, and then write '2', '3', '4' beside the names of your second, third, fourth choices.
- Fold your voting card and put it in the box.
- Now, treat yourself to a cup of tea and sticky bun... it's not every day you make a decision on the future of Europe!



Better World Books – better for the world, better for you

Better World Books is a company that collects used books worldwide and sells them online.

Every time a book gets sold, a percentage of the sale goes to the person who donated the book and or a literacy charity, for example, NALA in Ireland. In the last two years NALA has received over €5,000 from Better World Books (mainly from books donated by Irish libraries, big thanks!) which we have given to local literacy projects around the country.

You can read about all the projects who have received funding on our website at www.nala.ie/support-us/better-world-books.

Every time a book gets sold Better World Books also donate a book. These books go through their non-profit partners Books for Africa and Feed the Children. Total books donated as of November 2013 is over 10 million.

Any unsold books get donated to literacy projects or get recycled. Nothing ever goes to landfill.



We're looking before we leap!

Do you have a literacy project or idea that will make a real difference to your community?

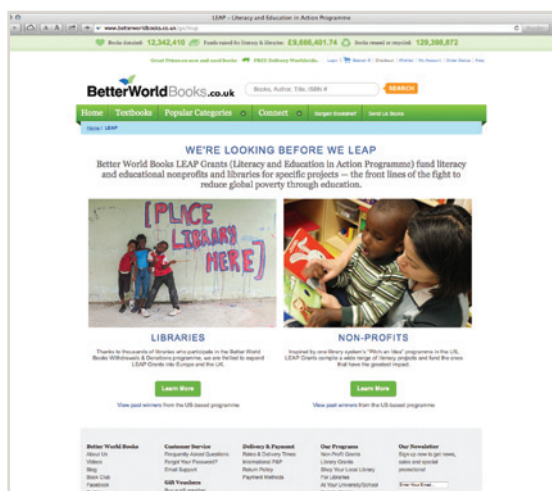
While Better World Books mainly partner with non-profit groups like NALA in Ireland and the National Literacy Trust in the UK, they also fund community-focused projects that have an impact at the local level.

Better World Book **LEAP** Grants (Literacy and Education in Action Programme) is intended to compile a wide range of projects and fund the ones that have the biggest bang for the buck.

There will be grants available for libraries and community literacy projects in the UK and Ireland.

Here are the details:

- £20,000 funding available
- 2 x £5,000 grants for nonprofits
- £10,000 for libraries, maximum of £4,000 per project
- Closing date is 13 June 2014



If you're passionate about literacy in your area, fill out the application form on www.betterworldbooks.co.uk/go/leap and submit it according to the instructions by 13 June at 5pm.

If your project goes on to become one of the finalists, Better World Books will also contact you for photos and videos of the literacy project. They will post these as part of the public voting phase.

As you develop your grant application keep the following in mind:

- Projects should address the literacy needs of underserved populations in their community.
- Organisations may pitch only one project each, with a maximum award of £5,000. Be sure to clearly outline the project elements that require the requested funds.
- Projects that will have a measurable and long term impact on an underserved population and will continue to operate after grant funds have been used will be looked upon favourably.



Could you help Better World Book collect books?

While Better World Books have a long standing relationships collecting and reselling books from libraries and other large organisations, they also like to collect from the general public, through large 'Drop Boxes', similar to charity clothes or recycling banks, in recycling facilities.

Better World Books collect and ship the books from these Drop Boxes to their warehouse where they are scanned and sold through multiple online marketplaces.

When they did this in Edinburgh recently they collected over 200,000 books in seven months – generating much needed funding for local literacy projects.

If possible, we would like to trial something similar here in Ireland and give the proceeds to local libraries or literacy projects.

If you think you could organise a trial of a Drop Box and have a suitable location, for example a Recycling Centre or a Library or Shopping Centre carpark we would love to hear from you.

Email info@nala.ie.

Want a healthier population? Literacy is the best remedy

Information about health comes to us from many different sources such as newspapers, television, websites and advertising. At times, it can be very confusing.

Health literacy involves us being able to understand basic health information whether we receive it in writing, in person or over the phone. We should all have the ability to understand our treatment options and make informed decisions about our own health.

Research shows that many people find it difficult to read and understand health-related information such as signage, information leaflets, directions on medicine packs, consent forms, prescriptions and medical advice.

For over ten years NALA has worked to secure a government commitment to prioritise health literacy in developing future health policy. The following paragraphs highlight some of our achievements and ongoing work in this area.

First ever government commitment to health literacy

In 2013 the government launched 'Healthy Ireland' – a new national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of our country over the coming generation.



We were delighted that 'Healthy Ireland' includes a commitment to address and prioritise health literacy in developing future policy, educational and information interventions.

Health Literacy Advisory Panel

The Health Literacy Advisory Panel (HLAP) was set up in 2010 and NALA took over the secretariat of the Panel in 2012. It consists of organisations working in healthcare who are interested in advancing actions and strategies to improve health literacy in their own organisation and influencing a national health literacy policy. Members include the HSE Health Promotion and Improvement and Social Inclusion Units, Irish Cancer Society, Irish Hospice Foundation, Temple Street Children's University Hospital, University College Cork, University College Dublin and MSD.

Seeking health literacy friendly practice

The Health Literacy Advisory Panel seeks to make the Irish health service literacy friendly (where literacy is not a barrier to treatment). It will work to influence the health service in every context: promotion, prevention and access to care and maintenance.

Health Literacy Action Plan

The Health Literacy Advisory Panel developed an **Action Plan** to progress health literacy in Ireland over the next three years.

The Action Plan identifies seven stakeholders to explore and work with to progress health literacy. For each stakeholder, NALA identified a top goal and the action plan outlines how we will achieve these goals.



Stakeholder	Top Goals
Department of Health	To progress the implementation of health literacy policy
Health Service Executive	To embed health literacy initiatives into service plans To have health literacy friendly practices in Primary Care Centres
Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)	To explore the development of health literacy as part of national standards for health care delivery
Healthcare Practitioners (HCPs)	To support healthcare professionals adopt health literacy friendly practices in their everyday work
Healthcare settings including hospitals, primary care centres	To have more healthcare settings become health literacy friendly
Education and Training settings	To build health literacy into education and training curricula where appropriate
General Public	To increase awareness of health literacy and its impact

The Department of Health supports the Action Plan as a contribution towards the implementation of Healthy Ireland.



Upcoming work

In May, NALA will deliver a half-day workshop for doctors on **Better health literacy = better patient wellness**. This is being organised through the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. The session aims to:

- introduce health literacy and health numeracy;
- highlight basic skills that patients need to engage in healthcare today along with problems that often occur; and
- explore practical strategies to communicate health messages more clearly.

MSD – helping raise awareness of Health Literacy

The MSD NALA Health Literacy Initiative is a partnership between healthcare company MSD and NALA that aims to increase awareness about the issue of health literacy in Ireland.

It includes a great website **www.healthliteracy.ie** that provides lots of information about Health Literacy for the general public, health sector workers and academics.

MSD also organise the Crystal Clear Health Literacy Awards that raise awareness and recognise excellence amongst those working in the health sector to communicate in a clear way.

Now in its seventh year, the awards have received a firm increase in entries with over 131 entries received this year from GPs, nurses, practice managers, physiotherapists and journalists.

The shortlisted candidates will be invited to attend an awards ceremony on Thursday 15 May in Dublin.

See **www.healthliteracy.ie** for more information.



NALA joins major European literacy network



In 2011 the European Commission established an expert group in the field of literacy. This group examined how to support literacy throughout lifelong learning, identified common success factors of literacy programmes and policy initiatives, and came up with proposals for improving literacy.

Following the work of the group, the European Commission started a network to reduce the number of children, young people and adults with low literacy skills by 2020.

NALA has joined 80 organisations from 28 countries in this new European Literacy Policy Network called ELINET. The network aims to analyse and influence literacy policies in Europe, as well as raise awareness of literacy issues. One in five European 15 year olds, as well as nearly 75 million adults, lack basic reading and writing skills, which makes it hard for them to get a job, and increases their risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The network is made up of existing national literacy associations and foundations, policymakers, literacy centres, and other stakeholder groups working in the area of literacy.

The network has received funding from the European Commission to complete a two year work programme. During this time, it will develop standards and tools that can be used by different members, as well as supporting existing and encouraging new activities.

In February, representatives from the partner organisations came together to mark the start of the European Literacy Policy Network (ELINET) in Vienna, Austria. Here Inez Bailey, Director of NALA, was elected by members onto the management board. John Stewart, National Literacy Coordinator for NALA, will work with other ELINET members on awareness raising activities.

"As a core member of the network we will contribute to the area of awareness raising and help with other areas related to literacy policy. Currently we are working on an awareness raising toolkit. This toolkit will be an online resource that will provide examples of the best European awareness raising activities that already exist to promote literacy. It will be a place where organisations can get ideas about activities to raise awareness of literacy and choose to replicate one that is most relevant to them," said John Stewart.

For more information contact John Stewart, NALA on jstewart@nala.ie.

The case for Blended Learning grows



NALA's work in the area of Distance Learning has long been documented. Reports and evaluations attest to the efficacy of this work in supporting learners in returning to education and in gaining national accreditation. In 2012, the European report, *Strategies for Improving Participation in and Awareness of Adult Learning*, listed our Distance Learning Service (DLS) as one of 16 examples of best practice globally for improving participation in adult learning. And the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning lists NALA's work as an example of Effective Literacy Practice.

As NALA has developed its distance learning resources and offerings, many learning centres around Ireland have been discovering just how useful and effective they can be in blended learning contexts. To date, over 180 different centres have used **www.writeon.ie** in some way to support centre-based learners.

Blended learning refers to a mixing of different teaching and learning techniques. For example, a blended learning approach can combine face-to-face tuition with computer based learning.

NALA's 2011 Blended Learning report examined how this worked in 12 learning centres. Since then, NALA has been providing training to local literacy providers in how they might introduce blended learning approaches to increase learning time, expand capacity and offer accreditation that might not otherwise be available.

This growing interest in using blended learning methodologies to cater for the needs of a 21st Century audience is also reflected in the Department of Education and Skills Review of ALCES funded Adult Literacy Provision, published in 2013 – see page 8.

Recommendation 15 of this report states:

Access to distance and blended learning should be integrated into all service delivery and these options should be promoted for all students in Adult Literacy programmes in order to increase access to learning opportunities. Therefore, every VEC should offer distance and blended learning options such as **www.writeon.ie** to students both as standalone and integrated into mainstream delivery.

It is difficult to think of an Irish adult who could not benefit from better ICT skills, for financial, leisure or communications purposes. Integrating ICT into content delivery through blended learning is to NALA an obvious way to ensure we are best meeting the needs of today's learners. And from an economic point of view, it means more learners can be reached in a time when resources are coming under increasing pressure.

There is an opportunity to kill many birds with the one stone. All it needs is for everyone to grab this opportunity.

For more information on Blended Learning contact Tom O'Mara on **tomara@nala.ie**.

James and George provide the right hook



Recently we got a call from a researcher on Newstalk's The Right Hook show. George Hook wanted to speak to someone who had literacy difficulties and who had returned to education. Former All Ireland Featherweight Champion Boxer James Coughlan put his name forward and gave a fascinating account of his life and return to education in Dublin Adult Learning Centre.

James is born and bred in Dublin. As a youngster he went to school in Sheriff Street but ended up leaving when he was only 13 unable to read and write properly. "It was rough enough, there were 47 in my class and you'd be afraid to put your head or hand up," says James.

As a young adult, James put all his energy into boxing and was All Ireland Featherweight Champion Boxer – he even fought world champion Barry McGuigan in his early years.

After this he worked in different jobs but could never go for promotion because of his poor literacy skills. "I could read things like ESB bills, things that I looked at regularly but otherwise I would avoid any situation where I would be required to write, especially filling in a form of any description," he says.

Today, James has six grown-up kids. They only found out recently that he couldn't read or write properly. "I always tricked them as kids by making up stories from the pictures in books because I couldn't read them," he says.

James decided to go back to education as an adult six years ago in Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC) and since then he has never looked back. He started in one-to-one literacy tuition, progressed into a group and went on to get an A in his Junior Cert.

"Since then I've gone up to FETAC Level 5 and have got a qualification to work as a carer which I have been working at for the last 3 years. I now work 12 days on and 2 days off as a carer for elderly people, and I absolutely love my job. It gives me a great insight into life and what could be down the road for any of us," says James.

"I would encourage anyone to return to education as it has been such a positive experience for me," says James.

You can listen to a podcast of the show at www.newstalk.ie

The Vancouver PLAIN Language Conference and its value to NALA and to adult literacy

NALA is honoured to have been chosen to host the 2015 Plain Language Association International Conference. We are busy planning for this major event.

The 2013 PLAIN conference was held in Vancouver and our former colleague Clodagh Mc Carthy, who is now living in Canada, attended and reported on this conference. This article is based on Clodagh's report, and we hope that it will give you a sense of the conference and our stance at this time on the points mentioned.

Joe Kimble, an icon in plain language, opened the Vancouver conference. He spoke of the many legal challenges involved in drafting US federal court rules. This was a thought-provoking presentation as Ireland has yet to have legislation on plain English at Government level though our work with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has resulted in plain language being a higher priority in the plan.

Neil James, Director of the Plain English Foundation in Australia was the first speaker. Neil presented on the future of plain language in a range of professional areas such as information design, editing, technical writing and usability. He argued that these professionals are converging in relation to how they are communicating.



This convergence (coming together) is happening due to influences such as technology, statute and information flow management. We have noticed this trend as NALA's Plain English Editing and Training Service is being contacted by clients in some of these sectors. We welcome this development.

Karine Nicolay from IC Clear, an EU-funded project spoke about IC Clear's plans to develop the first distance learning year-long course in plain language. This programme is currently being piloted, and one of NALA's staff was lucky enough to be selected to take part. We will keep you posted!

The theme for the 2015 conference is Clearer language, greater efficiency and effectiveness. We intend to apply what we have learned to our plain English service and to our planning of the 2015 conference. As always, we are open to hearing any ideas you might have (large or small) about this conference and possible sponsorship opportunities. While people support the 'idea' of plain English, NALA members need to create a deeper understanding of what it is, how you communicate in plain English and why you should demand it from public information documents.

For more information on plain English, please visit our plain English website www.simplyput.ie or contact Claire O'Riordan coriordan@nala.ie.

Learning care lessons: Literacy, love, care and solidarity

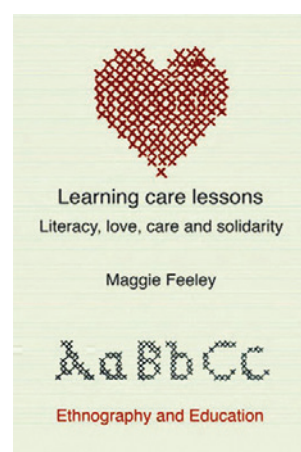
Learning care lessons is a new book about literacy and care that is based on research carried out in Ireland. It will be of interest to literacy practitioners and those concerned with finding solutions to persistent learning inequalities across the educational sectors.

The concept of *learning care* emerges from an educational ethnography focused on relational dimensions of learning literacy. Based on childhood memories gathered from adult survivors of institutional abuses in Irish industrial schools, the pivotal role of care in the learning process is highlighted through its absence. Learning care describes the affective attitudes and actions that support and encourage learning as care inequalities intersect with the more widely studied economic, cultural and political areas associated with unmet literacy needs. Although contextualised in the field of literacy, the notion of *learning care*, and the conceptual model proposed here, have more generic significance.

The model of *learning care* suggests four interrelated sites of affective significance located in the family (*primary learning care*), school or college (*secondary learning care*) and in peer and community learning contexts (*solidary learning care*). The fourth and pivotal determinant is found in the underwriting state duty to facilitate greater educational equality through just social structures (*state learning care*). In the case of those taken into state care, the usual accusation of family deficit in cases of unmet literacy needs is removed from the equation and the state stands accountable and without refuge.

Learning care abuses are not confined to Ireland or indeed to the past. Across continents similar cases of institutionalised educational neglect and injustice have emerged, perpetrated against aboriginal, poor and misrecognised minorities. Today, perhaps with less obvious savagery, such disregard persists in learning inequalities rooted in unequal and self-replicating systems of privilege, that cherish the potential of some, whilst wasting that of others. This book argues for the notion of *learning care* to be taken more seriously and for families, schools and communities to be equally resourced to do this work. The degree to which the state cares will ultimately determine whether or not this actually happens.

Learning care lessons: Literacy, love, care and solidarity is written by Maggie Feeley and is published by the Tufnell Press: www.tufnellpress.co.uk. It is also available from www.amazon.co.uk for €15.95.



Lots of free worksheets for you

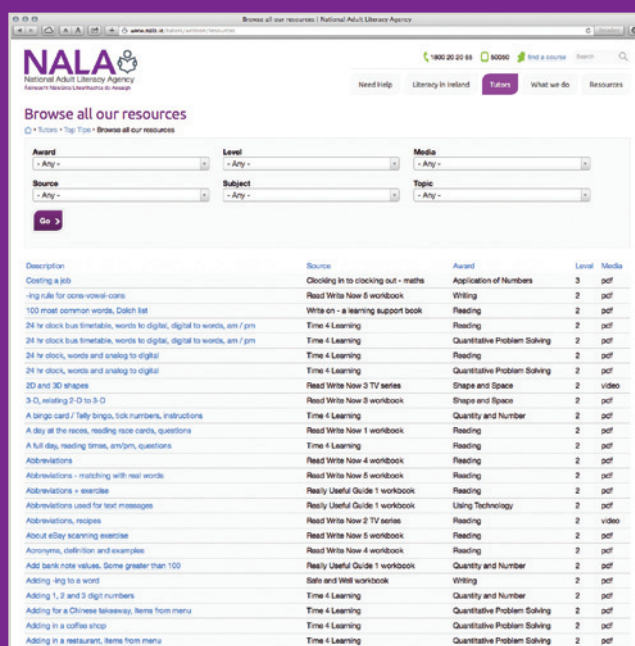
Choose from thousands of teaching and learning resources. You can search them by subject, level or FETAC/QQI award. They are free to download and print or even watch on youtube.

www.nala.ie/tutors/writeon/resources is a 'one stop shop' of all NALA's literacy and numeracy publications and videos over the last ten years. Each item is classified according to a minor award learning outcome at either level 2 or 3. There is also a brief but clear description of what each exercise covers.

"Although I have been tutoring for many years, I find I am always on the lookout for learning activities to meet students' needs and to cover specific learning outcomes," says adult education tutor Edel Donnellan.

"What I like about NALA's online resources is that it gives me access to a clearly laid out library of factsheets and exercises in one location. Having this availability of suitable, printable materials is a great help and saves me time when preparing lesson plans."

"I can also print off additional learning activities for individual students who need further support on a particular topic, for example, when to use capital letters or on the use of apostrophes," she says.



"I like to encourage the students themselves to use the resources. Its ease of access means students can take control of their own learning by printing off an activity of their choice and working on it, with and without the instruction of a tutor. This also helps to improve their computer skills."

"I would certainly recommend these resources to tutors and students looking for good quality, printable learning materials at level 2 and 3," says Edel.

Edel Donnellan is an adult education tutor with 20 years experience. For the past eight years Edel has worked as part of NALA's Distance Learning service.





Other news

Tutors' Forum in January

This year the forum was all about the importance of accreditation to learners at levels 1 to 3 and it gave tutors lots of tips on developing materials and delivering accredited literacy and numeracy programmes. Over 100 tutors attended the forum and got stuck into practical workshops in the afternoon.



Finola Butler and Siobhan Magee, Further Education Support Service (FESS) explained accreditation and the awards process.



Myra Close and Annette Walsh
ESOL Tutors at Maynooth



Liz Fay, Mary McDonagh, Kathleen Brangan and Marian O'Neill tutors from Crumlin College.



Teresa Byrne and Elaine Hughes,
tutors from Coláiste Dhulaigh

Learner Ambassador Programme in February

Over 80 students signed up to become local Learner Ambassadors and are now looking forward to giving talks in their local community.



Kevin O'Duffy chaired the first meeting of Learner Ambassadors in Dublin.

Students Days in Dublin and Cork

We had a great turnout at our student days in Dublin and Cork. Below, Lee, Ana and Judith at our student day in Dublin.



Dates for your diary

Numeracy Conference Thursday 12 June

**Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT),
Cathal Brugha Street, Dublin 1**

NALA and DIT will be co-hosting a Numeracy conference 'What really counts in Numeracy practice'. This conference will look at practice in adult numeracy teaching. There will be speakers from Ireland and abroad looking at the use of problem solving and collaboration as a teaching method. All participants will be able to attend three different workshops (from a choice of nine).

International Literacy Day Monday 8 September

**Dublin City University (DCU),
Glasnevin, Dublin 9**

NALA is hosting a conference on September 8 that will show adult literacy and numeracy tutors and managers how to use technology in teaching. It will cover what IT content and devices are relevant to adult literacy learners, how it can be delivered and what skills and equipment adult literacy tutors need.

Plain English training Dublin 3 July

Are you sometimes frustrated answering the same questions because the information given to customers is not clear enough?

Do you want to get quality training in how best to communicate, provided by leaders in plain English editing and training? If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, then this course is for you. You can register on www.nala.ie

AGM update

New members

Following our recent AGM, we are pleased to announce some changes to our board members:

- **Theresa Byrne**, Vice Chairperson – Adult Literacy Organiser
- **Trevor Moore**, Honorary Secretary – Manager CTC
- **Thomas Mc Manus**, Honorary Treasurer (re-elected for a second term)

Newly elected to the NALA Executive:

- **Frank Locke**, Student Sub Committee
- **Mary Bambrick**, Volunteer tutor
- **Máirín Kenny**, Adult Literacy Organiser
- **Mary Hilda Cavanagh** and **Bernadette Hurley** were re-elected for a second term.

Thank you!

We also say a huge thank you to outgoing Executive members Pat Ayton, Vice Chair; Cora Rafter, Honorary Treasurer; Councillor Denis Foley and Noelle O'Kane.

Watch highlights online

Ireland's digital champion David Puttnam was a huge success at our AGM. He spoke via skype about the need for everyone involved in education to

embrace the digital world. You can watch presentations from David Puttnam and our other guest speaker Ted Owens, CEO of Cork Education and Training Board, on www.nala.ie/tutors/continuous-professionaldevelopment/videos



Learner story

Fighting my Fear

by Dermot O'Brien

Fighting my fear is a short story about myself and my journey into adult education. I personally was always fighting my fear. From a little boy till I came back to adult education the fear was of being found out, of not being able to read or write.

My experience was when I was in secondary school the first week. I remember the teacher asking me a question in class.

What could I do?

There were twenty new people around me that I didn't even know. I stood up from my chair. I felt my face going red, my stomach getting tighter and twenty people's eyes staring at me. That was it. The fear I was going to be found out. I passed the teacher off that time and sat back into my chair and melted away. That was the way it stayed for the rest of my school years until now, until I went back to a one to one.


But that itself was not easy. I was afraid of meeting someone I might know and what would I say I was doing there. It's only now I realise I had nothing to hide because they are there for the same thing as me and are probably thinking the same.

At first it was not for me because I was doing so much fighting with myself. So I left, saying to my wife Tracey that I was just dumb and could never learn. Thank God for Tracey and the kids because they supported me and told me that I could do it. Tracey got some of the kids' books when they went to bed. I just got mad and said they were too easy. So it was then I said I had to go back to the VEC and I did.

I went to a class with three men and one woman. It was just for basic English. They know how to do it with you in the school. I know Tracey was doing the best at home with me. But in the class you feel like you have such a weight lifted off you because there are people there just the same and you don't have to hide anything.

That year flew by and it was the same the next year. So you see you can't just do this overnight. Now as for the year 2012-2013, I moved into a new class. One of the lads from my old class came along into the new one. I have really grown this year in confidence. So much I wrote a letter to Ray D'Arcy on Today FM to talk about this on the radio because I just want more people to feel as good about themselves as I do now. I was so proud when he read it out. Here was someone like Ray D'Arcy taking the time to read out my letter. It was a letter from someone who two or three years ago could not have even been able to put a sentence together.

I said it was a short story, so I am going to stop. See I just can't let the pen go now. All I can say to anyone who reads this is thank-you. But I want you to remember. There is one thing we all need to do and it will cost you nothing, not one cent. Learning to read and write will be like winning the lotto to someone who has the fear. Give your support and help to someone you know who cannot read because they cannot read this. You can. So don't ignore. Just help them open that door. Tell them to contact their local VEC or do it for them. It can be the start of a whole new life.



**Simply
Put.**

There are times when plain English works best

Writing and design tips to make your documents easy to read

1. Think of the person you are writing to and why.
2. Be personal - don't be afraid to use 'we' for your organisation and 'you' for the reader.
3. Keep it simple and define any essential jargon and abbreviations.
4. Use a clear font such as Arial or Verdana and use 12 point as standard.
5. Keep sentences to an average of 15 to 20 words.

www.simplyput.ie



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