

Issue 15 - Summer 2015 www.nala.ie

Literacy Matters

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



Health Literacy

New research shows that Irish people want healthcare professionals to use less medical jargon.

Also:

- We talk to Rosaleen Rice, an inspiring student from Galway
- An interview with Patricia Scanlan, author and founder of Open Doors
- Focus Ireland's successful PETE programme explained

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Welcome

Welcome to our summer issue of Literacy Matters.

In this edition, we talk to Rosaleen Rice, an inspiring student from Salthill in Galway. When Rosaleen left school at 14, there was no such thing as returning to education and she felt that chance had passed her by. But, with the encouragement of family and friends, Rosaleen decided to 'give it a go' when she retired and since then, hasn't looked back. Recently, she completed a course in NUI Galway – something she never dreamt that she would do. You can read her impressive story on page four.



Another inspiring interview is with one of Ireland's most popular authors, Patricia Scanlan. Mindful of the battles that those with literacy difficulties face, Patricia co-founded the Open Door series of books designed for the emerging reader. Now in its eighth series, she has recently enlisted authors Claudia Carroll, Ciara Geraghty, Roddy Doyle, Colette Caddell and Catherine Dunne to write five new books. On page ten, you can read about the challenges she encountered getting this project off the ground.

We hope you enjoy reading these and other articles about what is happening in adult literacy in Ireland. There is also an opportunity for our members to win a donation of 500 books from Better World Books or a collection of Open Doors novellas. Get your applications in now.

Remember, if you have a story you would like to share in the next edition of Literacy Matters, we would love to hear from you. Email us at media@nala.ie.

Best wishes for the summer ahead. As always, we hope it's a warm one!

From all the team in NALA.





Rosaleen Rice with Carmel Glynn, Tutor and Alison Jones, Deputy Director of Galway Adult Basic Education Service.

"I am the person I am because of the road I have travelled."

Rosaleen Rice is full of praise for everyone who works in Galway Adult Basic Education Service – Alison Jones, Carmel Glynn and Kieran Harrington, to name but a few. "The people you meet in the beginning are so important. I felt so vulnerable the first day I enquired about going back to education. I was so blessed to meet the people I met – it was the difference between whether I would stay or crawl back home," says Rosaleen.

Rosaleen has lived in Salthill, Galway, all of her life. Seventh of eleven children, she grew up in a very busy household. Like many people of her generation, she was

only 14 when she finished school, taking up the opportunity to train as an apprentice hairstylist. "A lot of people went into trades rather than stay in school," says Rosaleen. "I do recall that I wasn't alone on that, a lot of junior hairdressers were of the same age as me," she says.

Rosaleen was a quick learner, acquiring new skills in styling, cutting and all aspects of hairdressing. At 19 she became manager. "I always think my mother made a wise decision when she suggested I train as a hairdresser. I would have drowned in secondary school but when I started



“For all the years of my life that I passed by NUI Galway, I never dreamt that, one day, I would be a student in the University.”

hairdressing, I came into my own. I became more confident and my self-esteem grew,” she says.

Rosaleen eventually came to own the business, helped in no small part by the fact that she married Michael Rice, the person who originally employed her to be manager! Rosaleen and Michael went on to have five lovely children together - three daughters and two sons.

Although Rosaleen left school with very little education and weak literacy skills, her own thirst for knowledge and her desire to support her children’s education motivated her to keep trying to improve her skills.

“I was self-taught and by working on my reading it improved. When my first child was born I introduced her to books at the age of six months. Through reading to her and to my other children, my own reading ability improved. I’ve always had a love of books and would always give my children presents of books. I think that has given them a love of books too.”

Rosaleen decided to retire from hairdressing and closed her business after her fifth child was born. However she continued to work all her life, supporting her husband’s driving school business and then running her own B&B for 15 years.

It was only when Rosaleen retired that she decided to take her first step back to education. “I lost my brother and sister in a short period of time and it made me reflect on my own life. I felt that if you have an issue in life you should really do something about it, rather than wait. I always wanted

an education. My sister Anne Broderick was the driving force behind me returning to education after I shared my feelings about my lack of education with her. She had done the tutors’ course in Galway Adult Basic Education Service and suggested that I get in touch with them. She even made an appointment for me as I was quite nervous in taking that first step myself,” says Rosaleen.

“The first person I met was Alison Jones. I found her to be the most open and truly lovely lady. It was such a big step for me going back to education that I actually broke down and cried when I started talking to her. But she was so understanding and put me instantly at ease. She suggested that I start on one-to-one and that’s when I met Carmel Glynn,” says Rosaleen.

“Carmel is the most amazing person – we clicked from the moment we met. In fact we have become great friends. She gave me all the encouragement I needed. In the end, I started writing short stories and her reaction when I would read one of my stories was so moving and touching. She unlocked something and made me believe in myself. I was beginning to discover things about myself I hadn’t known I was capable of and I can’t thank her enough,” says Rosaleen.

It wasn’t long before Rosaleen was being encouraged to try some exams, sitting Junior Cert English and Maths in 2012 and the Leaving Cert in 2014. Naturally, one subject wasn’t enough for Rosaleen!

“At the interview for the Leaving Cert course, it was suggested that I try all six subjects. So I did. I studied Irish, English, Business,

"I decided to share my story in the hope it might help someone else."



Maths, History and Geography. It was a challenge and there were times I questioned myself as to whether I could do it. However, with the encouragement I received from my tutors, family and my husband Michael, who dropped me off and picked me up each day, it helped me to persevere with it. To have completed the course and receive my Leaving Cert results was far beyond anything I ever imagined. I didn't think I would be capable of sitting a state exam, as I believed that this was a closed chapter of my life. It's the most amazing feeling," says Rosaleen.

More recently, through more encouragement from her tutors, Rosaleen has completed an Access course in NUI Galway. "For all the years of my life that I passed by NUI Galway, I never dreamt that, one day, I would be a student in the University, or that it would be possible for me to be like other students, using the library, handing in assignments, dealing with the pressure of deadlines. You feel such a huge sense of achievement," she says.

So, what's next?

"I'm not sure. I have applied through the CAO to do a degree. I'm toying with that at the moment. I'm not sure if it's what I really want to do. But what I do know is that it's a wonderful place to be, to have that option. If I ever in the past doubted myself, going back to education has made me realise that I have the ability," says Rosaleen.

Recently, Rosaleen has done radio interviews, sharing her journey of going back to education in the hope that it might encourage others. "I would have always been very private about my life regarding my educational background, but, because of the joy this has given me, I decided to share my story in the hope it might help someone else. I know there are other people out there of my generation who may wish to return to education but do not know where to turn, so I hope I can encourage them".

"The support you get is huge. The tutors are so helpful. You learn what you want to learn, you don't have to do exams. I would encourage anyone to take that first step. I know I am the person I am because of the road I have travelled. Thank God for a second chance," she says. We couldn't agree more!



Would you like free books?

Better World Books has 5,000 books to give away

Better World Books has offered NALA ten pallets of 5,000 books for our members. Each pallet has a mix of 500 second-hand, fiction and non-fiction books. So, if you would like to set-up or restock a library this could be an ideal opportunity for you.

We can only offer delivery of individual pallets. That means one pallet of 500 books, so you might want to join together with another centre and share the books.

To apply, fill out our online form at tinyurl.com/nywqhjo by Friday 29 May 2015. It's first come, first served!

Please note that this offer is only available for paid members of NALA from large and small organisations.

Better World Books has given 13,000 books to adult literacy projects in Ireland!

Earlier this year, we were delighted to assist Better World Books to give 13,000 books to 20 adult literacy projects in Ireland. The books are now being used to restock old libraries and help some literacy centres create new libraries for their students. Recipients include Adult Literacy Centres, Community Training Colleges, Youthreach and probation services in Cork, Dublin, Kerry, Limerick, Mayo, Galway, Waterford, Meath, Tipperary and Longford.



Better World Books is a for-profit, socially-minded organisation that collects and sells used books online to raise money for literacy charities around the world. Every time a book is sold, a contribution is made to literacy.

In 2011, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) became Better World Books' chosen charity partner in Ireland. Since then, Better World Books has donated €6,000 to NALA, which we have given to local literacy projects to buy resources.

Help us support Irish literacy projects

The more books people buy from Better World Books, the more funding that will become available to support local projects. **You can buy books here** www.betterworldbooks.co.uk



"Students learn best when they have confidence in their tutor and when the atmosphere is relaxed and respectful."

Martina Needham is well known in adult literacy circles for being a dynamic and passionate educationalist in Donegal. Since starting as a volunteer tutor in 1989, she has seen many changes over the years. Here Martina talks about her work and why there is still no such thing as a typical day.

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

The first major change was the move from mainly one-to-one to group tuition. I feel that this change was a key factor in the growth of the service. Offering learners a place in a group sends out a clear message that their entry level is quite usual and nothing to be uncomfortable about. Within a group, learners not only get the support of the organiser and tutor, but also, the other learners.

The second major change is being able to offer learners accreditation. The readiness of students to have their learning validated through a level 1, 2 or 3 programme or the Junior Certificate opened my own eyes to the need to give all learners the option of this validation of their progress.

How many courses do you offer?

I am looking at the timetable on my noticeboard and the many groups availing of a wide range of tuition options. This includes, Level 1 (Core Skills Group), Level 2 (Essential Skills - English, Maths and IT), ESOL, Junior Certificate in English and Maths, Level 3 Employability Skills, Communications and much more. Students like to know that they are going to be placed at the correct level and we use 'Skills

Checker' to help us do this. This gives them confidence as they take the initial step back to learning. English, spelling, reading, IT and maths are the subjects most in demand.

How many tutors work with you?

The centre has eight part-time group tutors and two volunteer tutors. Most of the tutors have been with us for the last five or six years. We have a formal group tutor meeting every term and share information, as well as providing updates on developments. Of course, we all meet informally on a daily and weekly basis. Tutors can sometimes feel isolated and it is important to provide support and affirmation. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is very important and I feel that it is essential to provide regular training. Last year we gave all our tutors training on summative assessment techniques which resulted in an increase in the number of students receiving accreditation. We also had a very successful workshop on numeracy by NALA.



Martina Needham

"Give me the student for five weeks, reluctant or not, and we will keep them for the entire course."

Is there any such thing as a typical day?

There is really no typical day. When I am in the centre, I deal with requests from tutors and students and set up appointments with potential students referred from the Department of Social Protection or some of the other networks that we have developed over the years. Then there are meetings with colleagues from other programmes and, of course, our own countywide ALO meetings. Add to this sorting accounts and it makes for quite a full day.

Have there been cutbacks?

Cutbacks have not, so far, had a negative impact on the service that we provide. My one fear for the service is that students who are unemployed may feel pressured to attend. A reluctant student in any group has the potential to have a negative effect on the entire group. I hope it won't happen. My colleagues are tired hearing me say "give me the student for five weeks, reluctant or not, and we will keep them for the entire course". I have confidence in our service. The management information systems that have evolved to 'support' the service do not appear to have a clear understanding of the reality of how a literacy service works. I would like the designers of these systems to spend a week in a literacy centre to gain some insight into the reality on the ground.

What has improved in your opinion over the years?

I feel that the adult literacy service has become more 'confident' over the years. There has been a 'professionalisation' of the service, which is an integral part of the wider Further Education service. This is clear in the supports provided to other programmes, particularly Youthreach and, also, in the central role that our literacy service had in organising integrated literacy training and other CPD across the Further Education service. We have also begun working with the recently merged training services. All this is positive.

Do you have any top tips for tutors?

Preparation, preparation and preparation. A well-prepared tutor who respects his or her students will always be a good tutor. Students learn best when they have confidence in their tutor and when the atmosphere is relaxed and respectful. Setting a 'class contract' when a new group starts is always wise and, then, taking consideration of different learning styles when presenting topics and material.

Opening a door to reading



New Island has just published five new books in its fantastic Open Door series, which will be familiar to many in the area of adult literacy as invaluable teaching tools. Here we talk to Patricia Scanlan, author and creator of the Open Doors series.

Ms Scanlan, you are the author of several Open Door titles. How did you become involved in this very special series?

That's easy. Open Door was my brainchild. Before I became a full-time writer, I worked in Dublin Public Libraries. I was very aware of literacy problems, meeting people who could neither read nor write, but who wanted desperately to learn to do both. I also met literacy tutors who railed at the lack of suitable material and I felt the frustration of handing a fifty-year-old books more suited to seven-year-olds. It was while I was working on my second novel, Apartment 3B, that a literacy tutor jokingly said to me that I should write a novel for my local literacy group. It gave me food for thought.

Could I write a book suitable for people who were improving their literacy skills that would engage their attention and, most importantly, wouldn't patronise them? It was a daunting task. I spent a long time writing Second Chance. At first, it was difficult. I was conscious of keeping the sentences short and vocabulary simple, while also keeping an adult engaged. I wanted the reader to be eager to turn the page. I wasn't sure if I was succeeding. It was a lonely book to write. I was nervous giving the manuscript to the co-ordinator of Finglas Literacy Group, but her response was so enthusiastic, I was on a high.

Second Chance was published in 1994 and I remember saying at the launch how wonderful it would be if other popular Irish authors would write a novella so that literacy students would have a wide variety of choice.

Feedback from literacy groups to Second Chance was amazing and I was invited to speak to groups countrywide. I presented literacy certificates to students and their courage and determination humbled me.

Sadly, the publishers of Second Chance did not pursue my idea of a series. Nor did any of the literacy agencies that attended the launch. I approached New Island Books in 1998 with a view to publishing a series of literacy novellas written by well-known Irish writers. I was determined that the books would have the highest production values, so that no reader would feel embarrassed or ashamed to be seen reading one of the books in public. The team at New Island was highly motivated, committed and enthusiastic. It was exciting, to say the least.

Fortunately, I have several writer friends, so Deirdre Purcell, Marian Keyes, Cathy Kelly and Sheila O'Flanagan, to name-drop a few, were frog-marched to their computers with strict instructions to write a page-turner with short sentences and simple vocab. Ha! Wiped the smiles off their faces for a



while. I wrote to Roddy Doyle, Joe O'Connor and Vincent Banville, among others, as we wanted to keep a gender balance. Many men don't like reading 'women's books'. The response was gratifying - the Open Door series was born! It would never have worked without the commitment, enthusiasm and sheer goodwill of those fantastic writers.

Seventeen years on, and we've just published the eighth series, with stories from Roddy Doyle, Ciara Geraghty, Catherine Dunne, Claudia Carroll and Colette Caddle. The themes of this year's selection are varied enough to suit most tastes: male friendship, Alzheimer's, coming-of-age, dreams come true and detective fiction.

What, in your opinion, makes it so special?

The concept was very simple and very effective, but even more than that, it has far surpassed its original requirement. Open Door has become an educational tool, not only for emerging readers with literacy problems - it has now become an educational aid to those interested in improving their English language and reading skills. Many immigrant advice groups here in Ireland are now using them to assist foreign workers to improve their English.

Many teachers are using them in secondary schools to encourage teenage readers to get into the habit of reading. The goal being to promote the joy of reading so that the students will go on to read all the author's full-length novels. This strategy is working in many schools.

Finally, as I said before, the concept is very simple. Easy accessible writing, skilful storytelling that keeps the reader turning the page and makes the whole experience a joyful positive one rather than a chore.

The new series, along with backlist titles in the Open Door series, is available directly from NALA.ie



Win the latest collection of Open Doors books!

Answer this simple question.

In what year was Patricia's novel *Second Chance* published?

Send your answer to media@nala.ie.

Closing date for entries 30 May 2015.



Gretta Vaughan, outgoing Chairperson of NALA.

"I would like to thank all of those learners who risked so much so that the world could be a better place for so many more."

There were a quite a few tears shed at our AGM in March, when Gretta Vaughan stepped down as chairperson of NALA, after a four-year term and a long history with the organisation. In her final address to members, she recounted how she first heard of NALA and how learners have always inspired her. Here's how it went:

My involvement with NALA began back in the early 1980's. At that time, I was engaged in research for the School of Education in Trinity on a topic relating to adult literacy. It was then very much a hidden issue and had not registered to any great extent in the popular imagination. I subsequently started work in adult literacy, whereupon I happened upon NALA.

In the early 1980's NALA, as an emerging organisation, had yet to make an impact in the research world. So, imagine my surprise when, within the first few weeks of my new job in adult literacy, a newsletter arrived on my desk from an organisation I hadn't previously encountered, going under the acronym NALA, and I wondered who they might be. It didn't take me long to find out. The entire front page was given over to a critique of a research study under the banner headlines 'She should have asked the learners'. The 'She' referred to myself and the highly critical article was written by

one Ed du Vivier - a name I certainly never forgot! Needless to say, that newsletter never saw the light of day again.

I think I can say that I'm over it now!

The message, however, regarding the centrality of the learner to the whole adult literacy project was what drew me to the organisation over the following years, because, more than anything else, it has always been the central plank of NALA's work.

It's about the students, isn't it?
What else is there?

Because, when it's all stripped away – all the bureaucracy, all the politics, all the vested interests – what really matters is the quality of the student/tutor encounter. And whether or not the student is empowered to take control of their own learning and their own life. We need to make sure we get that right. Because, if we don't, all of the rest is to no avail.

"The volunteer ethos has proved its worth over the years and deserves to be appreciated, nurtured and maintained."

The litmus test at all times for everything we do has to be – is this working for the learner? Not for the institution or the system or the management but for the people at the centre of it all – the learners.

And, for the record, let us acknowledge the learners as being just that – people. Let none of us fall into the trap of referring to 'clients' or 'target groups' or other such terms, which serve only to downplay the essence of their humanity.

And when the learners say that one-to-one provision is important to them and that they have a concern about the phasing out of that type of provision, which has been heavily reliant on the volunteer ethos, then it behoves us all to listen. Because, in our rush to formalise and standardise everything in sight, we are in danger of losing the very feature which galvanised and characterised the literacy sector and served it so well from the governing board of NALA down to the individual volunteer tutor. The volunteer ethos has proved its worth over the years and deserves to be appreciated, nurtured and maintained.

From the bottom of my heart, I would like to thank all of those learners who have been such an inspiration all over the years – the Michael Powers, the Ernie Sweeneys, the Bridie Dalys, the Olive Phelans, the Tom Flynns and the Sean Glasheens of this world; wonderfully courageous people who put their heads above the parapet and risked so much so that the world could be a better place for so many more. Your enduring courage has been a beacon of light for us all - you have made it all worthwhile.

I would also like to express my gratitude to NALA staff past and present; people like Geraldine Mernagh, Rosamund Philips, Helena Farrell, Carrie Walsh, John Stewart, the irrepressible Inez and not forgetting Ed du Vivier. Those incredibly supportive people who guarded our backs and battled beside all of us who worked in adult literacy, as we fought the good fight, laughed a lot and cried a bit together as well. Thank you for making it such a memorable journey.

As one who has never been afraid to shoot from the hip, it's time for me to hang up the holster and pass the baton on to the incoming chairman, who will, together with the Director and the Executive, continue to steer NALA into the new era.

I wish the incoming Board every success with their work in the year ahead and I would like to think that they will have as rewarding an experience as I did.

It has been a privilege to have known and worked with you all.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.



Gretta Vaughan

New health literacy research and quality mark



Irish people calling for healthcare professionals to use less medical jargon

According to new research, two in five Irish people are calling for doctors, nurses and pharmacists to use more understandable language and less medical jargon. One in five want health professionals to speak less formally and take more time to explain things. Most concerning of all is that almost one in six people said they had taken the wrong amount of medication on at least one occasion.

“Many people find health information difficult to understand and may be putting their health at risk. People working in the healthcare sector play an important part in improving health literacy and numeracy by making an effort to communicate more clearly and making information more accessible to patients. Research has shown that patients who are better informed about their health have more effective consultations, are more likely to comply with their medication and, as a result, have improved health outcomes,” says Inez Bailey, Director, NALA.

What is health literacy and numeracy?

Health literacy and numeracy involves a person being able to understand basic health information, whether they receive it in writing, in person or over the phone. It also involves a person having the knowledge to understand their options and make informed decisions about their own health.

New Crystal Clear Pharmacy and General Practice Programme launched

The research was announced to coincide with the launch of the Crystal Clear Pharmacy and General Practice Programme developed by MSD and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). The programme has been developed to recognise the critical role pharmacies and general practices play in helping patients to understand their health issues and the steps they need to take to improve their health. A Crystal Clear Mark will be awarded to pharmacies and general practices that take account of the literacy and numeracy needs of their patients and who regularly evaluate and improve their services.

Pharmacies and general practices who wish to participate in the Crystal Clear Programme simply need to log on to **www.nala.ie/crystalclear** to complete the online audit, which will identify what they are already doing to support the literacy and numeracy needs of their patients and what they could do better. Those who are successful in completing this audit can then apply for the Crystal Clear Mark.



Dr Michael Wolf, health literacy expert and Minister Kathleen Lynch, TD at the launch of the Crystal Clear programme.

What people said

"One in three people in Ireland today are living with a chronic condition that requires ongoing self-management with the support of a healthcare professional. Clear communication and understanding is absolutely vital for anyone who needs to make decisions about their own health or those of a loved one," said Kathleen Lynch, TD, Minister of State for Primary and Social Care.

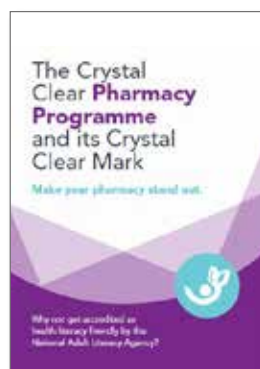
"The research shows that patients are calling for healthcare professionals to speak to them in a more understandable manner and the feedback we have had from pharmacies and general practices supports this finding. That's why we are delighted to support the establishment of the quality mark which recognises those pharmacies and general practices which are actively taking steps to ensure that their facilities are planned in a way that makes it easy for patients to access information and their staff are trained to communicate clearly", said Brian Longstreet, Managing Director of MSD Human Health.

"For a long time, we've had the attitude that it's a compliance issue, the idea that it's your fault... now is the time to go back and look at how difficult it is to be a patient and ask how some of the complexity can be reduced," said Dr Michael Wolf, Global

Health Literacy Expert and Professor of Medicine and Learning Sciences at Northwestern University in Illinois.

"As a GP, if you do not have effective communication, the whole consultation with a patient can be lost. This made it an easy decision for us to apply for this quality mark and undertake the audit process. Our staff has benefited hugely from the process and learnings, and, as a teaching practice, we continue to pass on this ethos to all student and intern GPs," said Dr David Maloney, Development Partner at Mallow Primary Healthcare Centre in North Cork, which was awarded a Crystal Clear Mark.

Log on to www.nala.ie/crystalclear to complete the online audit.



You can download a guide to the Crystal Clear programme on www.nala.ie.



Inez Bailey, Director, NALA, Hazel Slevin, Pharmacist, Moyross and Brian Longstreet, Managing Director, MSD Human Health.

Health literacy: A pharmacist's perspective

By Hazel Slevin, supervising pharmacist in the People's Pharmacy, Moyross, Limerick.

My interest in Health Literacy started when I was working as a pharmacist in Moyross, Limerick. I noticed patients would question directions for medications and that I would receive phone calls from patients later in the day, or the next day, to clarify what I had said. Sometimes, patients would request their medication, not by name but by the colour of the tablet.

One particularly alarming incident occurred when a patient was advised to stop blood thinners prior to a medical procedure and mistakenly stopped their cholesterol tablet instead - causing the hospital to have to reschedule a procedure.

I started to really understand what a challenge medication and healthcare can be for an individual with a lower level of health literacy. For example, if a parent finds reading or numeracy difficult, can you imagine the impact it would have on the treatment of a child with diabetes?

For example, the complicated tablets or insulin regime, dialling up the correct doses of insulin units, reading the monitor on a blood glucose machine and recording all this complicated information in a diabetes diary. Many of us, as healthcare professionals, would be daunted by this task – for some people the distress caused by this is very real.

“What’s the benefit of having all of this knowledge if I can’t communicate effectively to my patients?”



I spent considerable time, in university and after, expanding my knowledge on medication and identifying the important information that has to be passed on to patients. Over the last year, I had started to question the benefit of having all of this knowledge if I can’t communicate effectively to all of my patients.

I think, for many of us, we have, on occasion, felt out of our depth when it comes to a particular topic - it may be related to finances, the economy or even health. Those moments when we feel a little embarrassed or shy about contributing. For people with low levels of health literacy this is an obstacle that can directly impact on their health and overall quality of life.

In my current position, it has to be faced daily, by not only the patient but, also, by the pharmacy team. It was the prevalence of poor literacy in the community that led to my colleague Ade Stack and I looking for a better way to communicate with our patients.

When MSD approached me to participate in the Health Literacy module being taught through UCC, we knew it was the right match. Through Dr Laura Sahm’s excellent lectures on Health Literacy, I became more aware of the red flags that can identify patients that have difficulty processing health information.

This, combined with the help and support of NALA, helped us to identify what is done well in the pharmacy and, most importantly, what we could do better.

The Crystal Clear audit – and, yes, I did flinch slightly when I heard the word audit - was very straightforward. It was quick to complete and gave the pharmacy team a systematic way to review our services. It helped us to think outside the box on how our communication could be improved and how to make life a little easier for those with poor health literacy.

The team from NALA were on hand for queries relating to the audit and, also, to provide excellent tips on how to communicate better and counsel patients with reduced literacy levels. These tips, such as making our medication labels clearer with less jargon, keeping information simple and how to recognise those patients that need a little extra time have all been utilised to improve our service.

The benefit of this audit has been noticeable in not only our service but, also, our patients. Over the last few weeks, we have had patients comment on the attention we have given them and how they feel their health and wellbeing is important to the pharmacy team. We are delighted with the impact on our patients after such a short period of time and know that the long-term results will be a better health service for our entire patient group.

The Crystal Clear award is the next step in progressing to a more patient-focused service. It will not only benefit a patient group with reduced literacy levels but, also, enhance the pharmacy team’s interactions with the entire patient base. The end result is better recognition of your patient’s needs and and providing a better healthcare service.

What can I do to ensure that I understand health information?

Ask Me 3

'Ask Me 3' is a simple set of questions you should ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist during every visit. These questions are:

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

Be prepared and ask questions

Sometimes it's difficult to remember everything you wanted to know or to ask your doctor or health care worker. One way to avoid unsatisfactory health consultations is to be prepared. Write a note of any questions or concerns you have before your appointment so that you don't forget anything important.

Check your understanding

Often, it is useful to check your understanding of what has been said to you by explaining the information back to your healthcare provider. That way, they can be sure that you have understood the discussion and can correct anything you may have misunderstood.

What can I do to ensure that patients understand health information?

Use plain English

As its focus is on everyday language, plain English helps to reduce the mystery and anxiety that surround certain health conditions. Shorter sentences, everyday words, a direct and personal tone and well-known images and symbols can contribute to clearer communication to everyone.

Medical jargon	Plain English
analgesic	painkiller
ascertain	find out
catheter	tube
excise	cut out
optimum	best
particulars	details
suture	stitch

Watch your numbers

When you talk to patients about their health or medication, don't assume they will understand quantitative concepts or that they are familiar with the measurements involved. It is best to focus on one key point at a time and to offer support where you can.

Encourage questions

Use open questions such as "Tell me about your problem. What may have caused it?" Try asking "What questions do you have?" instead of "Do you have any questions?"



Interview with Luis Jiménez

What's your name?

Luis Jiménez

Where do you come from?

Venezuela

What's it like there?

Sunny all the time. It's home.

When did you start attending ESOL classes?

Two years ago.

Which education centre?

City of Galway Adult Education Centre

Why did you sign up to the classes?

I couldn't speak any English when I arrived in Ireland. I wanted to communicate with people. I also wanted to read and write.

What was your first day like?

It was great. The teachers and staff were so welcoming and lovely. They made it all enjoyable. There was a very relaxed atmosphere. I was the only one from

Venezuela or even a Spanish-speaking country, so I had to try to speak English.

What type of tuition do you do?

I go to group classes. The group classes made it easier to learn, as all the students helped one another and there was a lovely atmosphere. There is normally seven students in the class, but it depends on the day.

Do you like the classes?

Yes, I love them. I love talking and communicating.

What do you like best?

Reading. I can now read in English.

How difficult is it to learn English?

Pronunciation in English and Irish accents is very difficult!

How do you think we could improve how English is taught?

More time for conversation. More classes.

What do you miss about where you are from?

My family. My friends. My country. The weather – it is sunny every day in Venezuela. But life is better for me in Ireland. I'm working and people here are very friendly.

What do you like about Ireland?

The friendly people. The atmosphere is great in the centre. My bosses and colleagues at work explain everything well and clearly to me. I'm happy at work.





Accreditation and the review of the Common Awards System

In Ireland, there are many ways to get accreditation. While some people do examinations to get a Junior or Leaving Certificate, others now choose to get specific qualifications and awards more relevant to their needs and interests.

For example, the Common Awards System is a structured award system for the further education sector. Standards of knowledge, skill and competence are expressed as learning outcomes (LOs). Students' work is assessed, and if it meets the requirements, they will receive an award.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is currently reviewing the **Common Awards System** and awards at Levels 1 to 3. The QQI have set up a review group and a number of sub-groups to inform the review. Adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL practitioners are included on these groups, with the remit to review the current awards specifications and offer recommendations on what changes or new awards could look like.

We spoke to a number of adult literacy and numeracy practitioners and asked them what they would like to see in the new award specifications. Here's what they said.

English for Speakers of Other Languages

"I think we are missing Level 1 and Level 2 for ESOL learners. I think there is too big of a gap between the Levels. At the moment, we are using Level 1 and Level 2 communication modules (reading, writing, listening and speaking) to start the learners. I think we need specific modules for ESOL learners, as these do not take into account the grammar requirements that these students need starting the language. Also, within these modules, there would seem to be a big gap between the literacy requirements needed for each Level. I think these communication modules are good for topping up the students' English but I think we need the basic ESOL modules to start them off. Otherwise, I feel we are messing the students around. In my opinion, if we have Level 1 and Level 2 ESOL, we are really giving the students the basic requirements of the language properly, which should stand to them as they progress to the higher level. I feel we should really be working on conversational ability a bit more to build up their confidence." Breda Hayes.

Quantity and Number

"At the moment, Level 2 Quantity and Number requires students to recognise the relationship between larger numbers, for example, 1,000, 10,000, 1,000,000. I would like to see this Learning Outcome being replaced with something else, as Learning Outcome one (QN1) only requires them to recognise numbers up to 100. I would like to see simple basic multiplication and concepts of basic division introduced at this level. It would also be useful to introduce very simple basic fractions (only in terms of parts of a whole), and decimals. I am concerned that, at Level 3, the learners not only need to be able to multiply and divide, know fractions, decimals, percentages and ratios, but they must also be able to convert between them. I feel that this is too big of a step between Levels 2 and 3. We need something to bridge the gap between the two levels. This would give learners a better overall general understanding of maths. It could all be more relevant to everyday life, involving basic tasks such as how to share out a pizza. Also, learners going on to Level 3 would be more ready for that level if they knew the basic concepts about multiplication, division, fractions and decimals." Áine Farrell Leonard.

Practical skills

"I would like to see a lot more practical skills' modules and craft-oriented courses included in the Level 1 and Level 2 module selection. This would enable us to draw more people into the system and, simultaneously, give them literacy and numeracy skills. I think we need to move away from the old-fashioned idea that literacy is for people who cannot read or write at all. We also need to move away from the idea that the subjects the learners study need to be Reading and Writing, or similar, in order for them to learn. We need to embrace the fact that education has become a very extensive part of life, not an addition to life. It has become complex and multifaceted. Taking this on board, we need to understand that, in order to engage people in furthering

their literacy and numeracy skills, we must offer them something which will enhance their lives, their image in the community and their sense of accomplishment. Most people will not go home and say to their neighbours how proud they are of achieving a Certificate in Reading. But they will go home and tell people in the community that they have achieved a Certificate in Craft, Technology, Art, Cooking or Design Skills. In obtaining these skills, they will have attained reading and writing and numeracy skills." Ger Waldron.

Learning for life

"I feel strongly that there is a gap in the current awards Learning Outcomes in the area of critical reflection and 'learning to learn' which must be addressed in order to empower learners and give them a greater independence in their learning (particularly important in an age when online and blended education is growing)."

"I believe that education should move at as fast a pace as the society it serves, therefore, it's imperative that the award specifications are flexible and that options to update them are open on an ongoing basis. The process of updating the specifications should include appropriate input from all relevant stakeholders, therefore learners should play a significant part in the review process as the accreditation system is in place to serve their needs. We must take the time to listen to the learner voice on this important matter." Pam Buchanan.





PLAIN's 10th anniversary conference

Clearer language, greater efficiency and effectiveness

September 17-20, 2015, Dublin Castle Conference Centre

The plans for the Plain Language Association InterNational (PLAIN) 10th anniversary conference in September are hotting up!

The deadline for the call for proposals has passed and the programme committee are now busily working with PLAIN to put together a very exciting programme on the theme 'Clearer language, greater efficiency and effectiveness.' We have received submissions from around the world, including India, Canada, Australia, Norway, UK, Chile, Argentina, Brussels, France, Ireland and many more.

The submissions highlight experience, case-studies and research from several fields: plain language, usability, user experience, technical communication, and information design.

Keep an eye on www.plain2015.ie for the final programme, which will be available in early May. Remember, early registration is now open and rates are very competitive!

We have an impressive list of speakers at PLAIN 2015, so register now!

Emily O'Reilly,
European Ombudsman and plain English champion, Belgium



Since Emily became European Ombudsman, she has formally spoken about plain language at the EU Plain Language Awards in 2013, at Clarity's (an organisation for lawyers

that promotes the use of clear language) Conference in 2014 and 2015. What is striking about Emily is her commitment to clear language, her awareness of how unclear language can discriminate against those with difficulties, including those with literacy difficulties, and her ability to laugh at instances where she thought she was writing in plain language when she was not. Emily will share her experiences of clear and poor communications in the context of her work as European Ombudsman. We can't wait!

Deborah Bosley, President of PLAIN, USA

Deborah is another interesting character. She is Principal of The Plain Language Group and Professor Emerita of technical writing at UNC Charlotte in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA.

As an international expert in the use of plain language, she has spent the past 20 years working in technical and financial regulatory environments, helping attorneys, corporations, government agencies, and non-profits create technical and financial written information that exceeds compliance standards and that is easy for people to understand and use. Deborah is also the President of PLAIN and is keeping us on our toes as we organise PLAIN 2015.

Dr Neil James, Executive Director of the Plain English Foundation, Australia

Neil is the Executive Director of the Plain English Foundation – a foundation that delivers plain English training, editing and evaluation, along with a campaign for more ethical public language. Neil has published three books and over 80 articles and essays on language and literature. Neil is a very engaging speaker and always brings something new and ‘testing’ to the discussion.

Dr Richard Marsh, Deputy Chief Medical Officer at Merck and Co

Richard is a newcomer to PLAIN conferences, but he is a veteran in terms of promoting and advancing health literacy and clear communication. Richard has a rich academic and professional background. He is a Fellow of the American College of Physicians and the College of Physicians in Philadelphia. He serves on the Board of the Merck Foundation and is committed to clear health communications and promoting health literacy. The mission of the Office of the Chief Medical Officer at Merck is to serve the best interests of patients and the field of medicine. His office is redefining how to apply health literacy principles to its direct and indirect communications

with patients. Richard’s input at PLAIN will be worth hearing and we thank MSD for sponsoring his input.

David Berman, Berman Communications and High Level Advisor to the UN

David is a Canadian and is an amazing speaker on design and usability. His focus at PLAIN 2015 will be on usability, clear design and ethics. While David has spoken at events in Ireland before, this will be the first time he will present at a PLAIN conference and we are all very excited to hear his ‘take’ on the theme – no doubt David’s presentation will make us think about morals and ethics in communication.

David Marsh, Production Editor of the Guardian, UK

David is another ‘star’ in terms of clear communication. David has worked in newspapers for 40 years and has written the well-known book ‘For who the bell tolls’. As well as being the Production Editor of the Guardian



Newspaper, David also authored its style guide. We are looking forward to his insight and experiences as to how style guides contribute to clearer language, greater efficiency and effectiveness in organisations.

Okay, that’s all for now about speakers at PLAIN 2015!

So, register now to avail of PLAIN’s special early registration fee:
www.plain2015.ie

"Becoming earth-literate is so important at this particular time in our history."

Green Sod Ireland is a voluntary organisation set up in 2007 to conserve land in Ireland for present and future generations. It works to achieve this by both establishing safe habitats, called WildAcres, and providing environmental education for all age groups across Ireland. Here we talk to Melissa Griffith, Chair of the Board of Directors of Green Sod Ireland, about some of the great educational programmes they offer.

What educational programmes does Green Sod provide?

We provide environmental education for adults in Further Education and children in primary and secondary schools to promote 'earth-centric' thinking and 'ecological literacy'. We want to promote and encourage public awareness of the importance of conserving land and protecting the environment for the benefit of present and future generations. Our educational materials are designed for theoretical and practical learning. The aim of these education initiatives is to instil in learners a sense of responsibility for our shared heritage.

Do you have any resources suitable for adult literacy students?

Yes, we do. We have seven Earth Literacy workbooks that cover diverse adult interests from food and art to walking outside and woodwork. The workbooks have an emphasis on environmental education and are designed to support and strengthen literacy and numeracy skills for adults. Anyone can download them for free and photocopy them. The workbooks, in seven modules, contain student worksheets,

along with teacher's notes, lesson plans and learning objectives.

What topics are covered in the Earth Literacy workbooks?

The Earth Literacy workbooks aim to highlight the connections between everything in life, by showing how everything is connected to everything else and how, consequently, there are huge implications for all in the lifestyle choices we make.

The workbooks cover seven topics:

- **Family History**
- **Food - The Gift of the Earth**
- **Nature - A Walk in the Wild**
- **Environment Matters - Information Technology**
- **Numeracy**
- **Art and Design**
- **Woodwork**



Can you explain a little more what you mean by Earth Literacy?

Becoming earth-literate is so important at this particular time in our history, as we are faced with a massive global environmental crisis. In our view, we can no longer only consider human needs in our teaching and learning practices.

What is happening to the earth and the environment matters, as it impacts on our daily lives. People are experiencing, for example, higher food prices, poor local water supplies and ill-health and are only too aware that something needs to be done, both individually and collectively.

Teaching literacy is an opportunity to not only teach the basics of reading, writing and numeracy, but an opportunity, also, to raise awareness of how the lifestyle choices we make affect all of life, both now and in future generations. Hence, Green Sod Ireland offers Earth Literacy workbooks, with lesson plans and suggestions on how this idea can be taught as an integral part of adult basic education.

Not only will students improve their basic skills, but they will also be educated on important life issues and that is inclusive learning. This means that, through education, we are engaging with the most important issues and questions of our time – the survival and protection of life itself.

Are there any QQI accredited programmes?

We are working on getting QQI accreditation. Meanwhile, the books are ideal for what would have been FETAC Level 3 learners. Each workbook has learning objectives and aims to promote critical, ethical and creative thinking around environmental issues in the adult learner, as well as developing new skills.

Where can a person get more information or download the worksheets?

The workbooks can be downloaded from our website **www.greensodireland.ie**

There is also an environmental topic on **www.writeon.ie** for learners.

Focus Ireland – providing a bridge to education

Focus Ireland's vision is that 'everyone has a right to a place they can call home' and the organisation works to make this vision a reality for thousands of people every year.

Since the charity was set up by Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy in 1985, it has worked continuously to support people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Focus Ireland provides over 70 services around the country to combat and prevent homelessness and supported over 11,000 people last year who were homeless or at risk of losing their home. Focus Ireland also provides a place to call home for over 500 households in Cork, Dublin, Limerick, Kilkenny, Waterford and Sligo in houses the charity either leases or owns.

While access to housing and support services are vital to combat homelessness, Focus Ireland also know that it is important for people to gain access to education and training to help them plan for a more positive future.

Six years ago the charity set up the Preparation for Training and Education Programme (PETE). The project delivers a range of accredited and non-accredited training to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

We asked Michelle Carroll, Team Leader in the PETE centre in Halston Street, North Dublin to tell us more about this unique programme.

What is PETE?

PETE is all about giving people the skills and confidence to access mainstream education. Very often people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness have had a negative experience of early learning. Many students present with very poor literacy skills which makes it harder to return to mainstream education. Through PETE we try to bridge that gap by providing support that prepares people for education. Focus Ireland is committed to preventing homelessness and education is seen as one of the means to achieve this.

How do you encourage people to take part?

Many of the students have a fear of returning to education and a key part of the service is that our staff really encourages and engages with them to set achievable goals. Many of the students have to manage other difficulties, like addiction and mental health issues, to get to the point where they are ready to take part in an education programme.

How does PETE differ from other courses?

The main difference between PETE and other courses is that we offer a rolling system of enrolment which means that students can start with us at any point throughout the year whereas other education providers offer courses two or three times a year. We also offer high levels of one-to-one support to make it possible for students to complete courses and ensure they have a positive learning experience. We are extremely



flexible and this makes it easier for students to stay engaged.

What types of courses do you offer?

We offer a range of accredited and non-accredited courses which cater for all levels. It really depends on what a person wants to learn. The important thing is that we work with people at a level that they are comfortable with. Very often it's about building up a person's confidence. We always try to keep our classes small and offer additional one-to-one tuition to make sure everyone gets the support they need.

Do you offer accreditation?

We offer QQI Level 3 accredited courses in Kitchen and Cookery Skills, Computers, Self-advocacy, Career planning, Personal and Social skills, and Health and Fitness. There are also a number of non-accredited courses throughout the year, for example, Art, Introduction to computers, Literacy support, Gardening, Budgeting and Healthy Eating.

Our aim is to help build up people's confidence so that they can begin to plan for a more positive future.

Only recently we had an awards ceremony for 35 students who were awarded QQI Level 3 Certs in a number of subjects. It was a great event and marked the amazing achievements of students who persevered.

How do you use writeon.ie?

Writon.ie has been a huge success in PETE. We developed a specific class, called the NALA class, on Wednesday mornings. Students can come in, use our computers and work independently on writeon.ie, with a tutor on hand to support them. It's been perfect for our students because it offers them an immediate way of tracking their progress. Some students cannot commit to attending every week, but with writeon.ie they can pick up where they left off and keep progressing through the modules. We plan to continue offering the class next term.

How is PETE funded?

The service is mainly funded through donations to Focus Ireland, with some support from City of Dublin ETB and CDYSB. We also rely on volunteers to help us run our service

Please support Focus Ireland

Focus Ireland rely very heavily on the support of the public and local business and they need this support now more than ever before. You can donate online at www.focusireland.ie or call 1850 204 205. €0.89 cent of every euro goes directly on services to combat and prevent homelessness, including programmes like PETE.

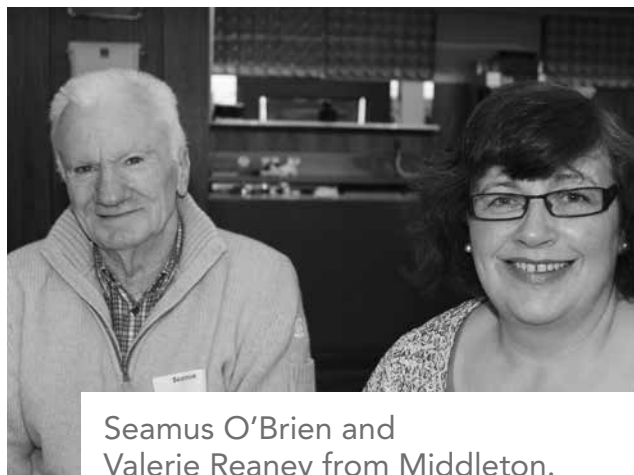
160 students attend the NALA Student Days in Cork and Dublin

The NALA Student Days in Cork and Dublin were a great success. One hundred and sixty students came to our events and listened to updates from the NALA's Student Subcommittee as well as taking part in workshops and discussions.

Thanks to everyone who helped to organise the Student Days and make them so enjoyable.



Lee Mitchell from Dublin and Margaret Murray, NALA Student and Membership Officer.



Seamus O'Brien and Valerie Reaney from Middleton.



Arcu Czavnechi and Grzegorz Rogala, Polish ESOL students from Fermoy.



The NALA Student Subcommittee.



Tony Quirke and John O'Shea from Youghal.



Patricia McDonnell from Mallow, Carol Elliot from Mahon and Mags Hayses from ALTRUSA.



David Treacy, Education Officer, City of Dublin Education and Training Board talks to students.

Other news



Brushing up A new learning workbook

Many of us struggle to learn spelling, grammar and punctuation. Once we finished school, we may not have used these skills as much in everyday life and

we may have forgotten them or be a little 'rusty'. This new learning support workbook covers the basics of spelling, grammar and punctuation. It is designed as a starting point for you to use, either on your own or with the support of a tutor. It has lots of tips to help you read and write more confidently. It also provides you with exercises to practise over time so you can improve these skills.

You can download a copy of the learning workbook at www.nala.ie/resources/brushing.



New Chairperson of NALA Trevor Moore

We are delighted to announce that Trevor Moore was elected by members to the position of Chairperson of NALA at our AGM in March.

Trevor has been a much valued board member of NALA since 2012 and we have no doubt that he will provide strong oversight and continue to make sure that NALA's strategic aims are put into practice.

Trevor has a long history of working in the area of adult education. He is currently the General Manager of North Wall Community Training Centre, providing training opportunities to early school leavers from the area. Prior to this, he worked as an Access Officer for Dublin City University, where he co-ordinated a range of programmes in the education sector to support students from under-represented backgrounds during their studies at the university. He also lectures in the National College of Ireland in all aspects of management, including corporate governance.

We wish Trevor well in his new role as Chairperson and look forward to working with him in the future.



Get the Numbers Write New TV3 series

'Get the Numbers Write' was a three-part series on TV3 that followed the lives of five adult learners who have returned to education and are currently attending the Louth Meath ETB Adult Learning Service. The programme highlighted the issue of literacy and numeracy among adults.

During the series, viewers were introduced to Chris Duffy (35) from Drogheda, Gerardine Dunphy (50) from Navan, who has been out of the workplace for over thirty years, Lithuanian-born Nadia Jerogova (32) who moved to Ireland in 2007 and has been trying to improve her language skills, Richard McCormack (59) and Johnny Carolan (45), both of whom have returned to adult education after many years.

Over the course of three months, the five adult learners – all of whom have returned to adult learning at LMETB – came together with the aim of bringing literacy and numeracy projects directly into the communities of Navan, Dundalk and Drogheda; to help others, create awareness, remove the stigma and improve literacy skills at a local level.

Congratulations to everyone involved in the series. **If you missed it, you can watch it on TV3 Player at www.tv3.ie.**

Read our research

- Case studies of teaching reading in Ireland;
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL): Blended Learning Project Report; and
- What really counts: Case studies of adult numeracy practice in Ireland.

These reports focus on different aspects of practice including general teaching practices, teaching strategies and concepts and the use of technology as part of a blended learning approach. The reports are intended to be a resource to tutors working in the area of adult literacy provision. They provide ideas and tips about teaching and learning activities and resources. The research will also inform the continuing professional development workshops and seminars that NALA offers to adult literacy practitioners. The reports are available to download free from the NALA website.

If you require further information on NALA research please contact Tina Byrne at tbyrne@nala.ie.

Communicating mathematical information and ideas to students



Arts Block, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin,
Thursday 18 June 2015 from 9.30 am to 3.30 pm

NALA and the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin, are co-hosting a numeracy conference this June. The focus of the conference is on communicating mathematical information and ideas to students. This will be a great opportunity to hear and meet specialists in the area of adult numeracy tuition. There will also be a choice of several different workshops in the afternoon where you can get more in-depth knowledge and share your experience of what works with other tutors.



Here are some topics that will be covered:

- How can you help students to see, read and use numeracy information?
- Introducing maths to the reluctant learner
- Problem-solving and applications
- Fractions, decimals, percentages and the need for meaningful contexts
- Using technology in the numeracy classroom
- Teaching and learning statistics using real data at levels 2 and 3
- Maths Eyes
- Teaching Algebra

Cost: The cost for attending is €30. The event is for NALA members only. If you would like to attend and are not already a member of NALA, you can join for free.

Note: You can also pay a membership fee of €25 to get extra benefits.

For more information book www.nala.ie



NALA

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Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

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