

Issue 17 - Summer 2016 www.nala.ie

Literacy Matters

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



A wealth of practice

New case study research that describes the work of tutors to improve students' financial skills, knowledge and understanding.

Also:

- Bray students star on TV3's Saturday AM show
- How to deal with a fear of technology
- A coping strategy for adult literacy learners

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Welcome

Welcome to our latest edition of Literacy Matters.

We started the year discussing the benefits of using technology at our Tutors Forum and much of this edition expands on this important theme.

On page six, we hear about five inspiring women from Ennis, all members of the Traveller community and all early school leavers. When they returned to education, they used a combination of supports including our website www.writeon.ie to get their first qualification. More recently, they have been conferred at Limerick Institute of Technology, paving the way for others in their community to give adult education a go.

Anne O'Mahony, a tutor from Cork, talks about how to remove the fear that often exists among learners and tutors around using technology (page eight). She tells us that we can learn from children, who rarely have a fear of trying new things. She firmly believes in the power of play and enjoyment and she suggests getting over our fear of using technology through playing simple computer games.

We also share an excerpt from a new report called 'A wealth of practice: case studies of financial numeracy practice in Ireland' on page 19. Money is relevant to everyone and it is a useful context in which numeracy can be taught and understood. The new report outlines six case studies that describe the work of learning centres and tutors to improve adult learners' financial skills, knowledge and understanding. It also suggests useful online tools.

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

Best wishes from all the team at NALA.



Bray students star on TV3's Saturday AM show

It was a cold and early start for students Tanya Byrne and Lee Mitchel when they were interviewed on TV3's Saturday AM show in January.

Tanya and Lee are students at Bray Adult Learning Centre and they were invited on the show to talk about their experience of returning to education.

Arriving at 8am for hair and makeup, they were joined by Clare McNally from NALA in TV3's studio who briefed them on the questions they might be asked. Thankfully, there wasn't much time to be nervous as everyone was brought into the studio to meet the presenters – Anna Daly and Simon Delaney. During an ad break everyone was seated, microphones were put on and then lights, camera and action!

Tanya and Lee stole the show as they encouraged all watching to give adult education a go.

Tanya, a married mother of four children, explained to viewers that when she was a child she didn't have a good experience of school. Because of this she used to mitch a lot and kept falling behind in class. By the time she went into secondary school she was so far behind that she didn't see the point in continuing and she dropped out in second year – she was only 13.

While Tanya could read and write, she found any kind of paperwork a nightmare. She hated filling in forms and would dread being given a form in the dentist's office or bank in case she would misunderstand it or it would have spelling mistakes. She always regretted dropping out of school and not getting an education – something she refused to let happen to her own children.

When her eldest child was in fifth year, Tanya saw an advert for NALA on the television and decided to give NALA a ring. She was very nervous and thought she might hang up, but she didn't. NALA gave her details of Bray Adult Learning Centre. Since then she has never looked back. She has done Level 3 Communications and Maths, which is the equivalent of a Junior Cert. She is now starting Level 4 Communications and Maths. This involves getting her head around algebra.

Five years ago, Tanya would never have turned on a computer, whereas, now she is never off it. She does the family's internet banking such as paying bills online and is happy using her smart phone. She told viewers that she never realised how not having an education was holding her back but now feels that a whole new world has opened up to her.



Left to right: Clare McNally, Lee Mitchel, Tanya Byrne, Anna Daly and Simon Delaney on the set of TV3's Saturday AM show.

Lee also left school early with very poor literacy skills. While he can read, his writing and spelling skills were very weak – so weak in fact that he would avoid any situation where he had to write. He would not even write a birthday or Christmas card because he was embarrassed about his writing.

A few years ago all that changed when he decided to go to Bray Adult Learning Centre. He started in one-to-one classes with a tutor and is now in a group class. He has recently completed a level 3 course in writing and is doing maths as well. He also told viewers that going back to education had made a huge difference to his life, as he is now more confident writing and also trying new things.

Congratulations to Tanya and Lee for sharing their story with the nation – we have no doubt there were people watching who have decided to give adult education a go after hearing their story.

A special thanks to Niamh Maguire, Adult Literacy Organiser at Bray Adult Learning Centre, Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board for her help setting up the interviews.

If you missed the show, you can still watch it on TV3s Player at this link:
www.tv3.ie/3player/show/799/103810/0/Saturday-AM



Five Ennis students lead the way

by Edel Donnellan, NALA Distance Learning Service Tutor

Here in NALA we are always delighted to hear of the success of students who have worked with us in the past.

In 2013, as part of the Ennis Community Development Project (CDP), five Ennis women, Bridget Mongans, Margaret Gannon, Mary McDonagh, Bridget McDonagh and Mary Frances Joyce – all members of the

Traveller community and all early school leavers – completed a FETAC Level 3 major award in Employability Skills using the NALA website Writeon.ie. All five women went on to continue their study at 3rd level with Limerick Institute of Technology and in June 2014 were conferred with a HETAC Level 6 Special Purpose Award in Health Advocacy and Community Development.



At the conferring ceremony at Limerick Institute of Technology were, from left to right: Mary Mc Donagh, Margaret Gannon, Mary Frances Joyce, Bridget Mc Donagh and Bridget Mongans.

Returning to education after many years was challenging and required a lot of commitment, but the women felt the flexibility of Writeon.ie was a great help. Working as a group meant that they could support and encourage each other while Writeon.ie allowed each of them to work at her own pace and ability.

"It was easy to understand and everything was well explained and you could go back over it as much as you wanted," said Bridget Mongans. "For me it was great to have the audio button so I could listen to all the information," said Margaret Gannon, who is blind.

So, how did they feel going to college?

The women agreed they were nervous and wondered if they would be able for it.

"At first I thought that it would be all 19 and 20 year olds, but in the college I saw all ages there so I didn't feel out of place," said Bridget Mongans, who is a mother, grandmother and great grandmother. "The subjects were really interesting, we studied Sociology and all health-related matters," said Bridget McDonagh.

They all felt that it took a lot of hard work and commitment to balance family, work and study. However, the teachers were extremely supportive and encouraging as were their families and the staff at Ennis CDP.

All of the women now work as Community Health Workers in the Primary Health

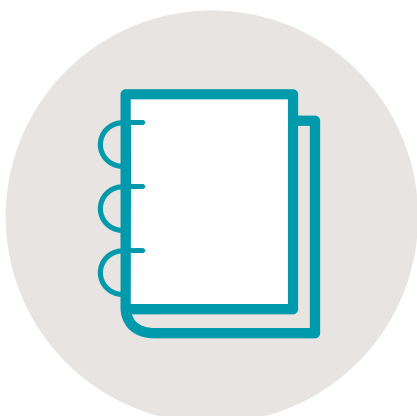
"At first I thought that it would be all 19 and 20 year olds, but in the college I saw all ages there so I didn't feel out of place."



Care Programme for Travellers in County Clare hosted by Ennis CDP and funded by the HSE. The job includes giving out health information and promoting health initiatives among the Traveller community all over County Clare. They encourage and advise people on the importance of going for cancer screening, attending doctor appointments and providing information on heart care and mental health issues. The women feel that it took a while to build up a relationship with the people they visit but now they are welcomed. More importantly, their information and support on health matters are being taken seriously.

Dr Siobhán O'Connor of Ennis CDP and coordinator of the project said that everyone in the CPD is very proud of the five women for all their work and commitment in achieving their qualification. The 2006 census figures showed that 53% of travellers had no formal education or did not continue in education beyond primary school and only a tiny number went on to 3rd level study. The women themselves hope that their success will encourage more travellers to return to education or to remain in education. These women are definitely leading the way.

Article written by Edel Donnellan, Distance Learning Service Tutor, NALA. Edel can be contacted at edonnellan@nala.ie



Dealing with a fear of technology

By Anne O'Mahony, Adult Literacy Tutor

Technophobia, logizomechanophobia, and cyberphobia, all describe forms of an extreme fear of technology. For many in the literacy sector, and life in general, the fear of technology may not be that extreme, but it is still there. The question is why?

Fear implies that there is a risk. So, what are we risking? We risk feeling stupid. We risk losing 'face' or respect. We risk losing our authority. We risk feeling excluded. Sometimes fear is around losing other people's data, our own privacy or breaking the machine. This last is, I believe, the result of Hollywood's fascination with the explosive self-destruct button and is not helped by jargon such as 'crash', 'burn' and 'killer apps!'

As humans we tend to weigh the risk against the reward. But as we go through life, how we see risk and reward changes. Young children rarely see risk at all. Teenagers tend to minimise the risk and maximise the reward. But, as we get older we tend to slide towards maximising the risk and minimising the reward. And, so, we open the door for fear to move in.

Why should there be a fear? Fear is what keeps us safe – it is our basic biological alarm and, as such, has two very important functions. It warns us of dangers and lets us know what is important to us.

For us as humans and social beings, we crave connection and relationships. If we don't know what is meant by the new language and terms that have become part of everyday communication to so many, then, of course, we feel inferior and excluded. That feels like an uncomfortable and dangerous place to be. This is where being in a group of like-minded people helps.

But, then, the overload of data and information too that comes at us can be overwhelming. So, like in the old joke about eating the elephant, the advice here is to **take it one bite at a time**. By breaking down the size of the problem, it can become manageable. Find a way to get what you want and remember to keep your mind open to other possibilities.



We can also fear losing the respect of those around us. It is not an unreasonable fear for anyone, including tutors. In reality we only risk this if we have feigned knowledge. With technology, you can **never** know it all. The world, the limits and the possibilities are shifting at a rate so fast that no one person can keep up with it all.

'In the area of technology it is never going to be possible to know it all.'

So why would we bother? What is to be gained? Or, to put it another way – what are the rewards? For each of us these rewards will be different but may include at least some of the following:

Inclusion: Knowing a few of the words and understanding these seemingly secret codes make us feel part of the group again. For example, understanding a little of text language and its evolving nature removes some barriers. Fortunately, technology has become driven by Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs) graphics and icons that are easier to use.

Identifying the 'killer app': While it may sound threatening in computer terms, it simply means an application desirable enough to overcome the odds. For some this is Skype, for others it is YouTube and for others it is the device you use to take photographs of your family.

A tool for learning: Technology is a gateway to a world of information. It is also a tool that lets a learner work at their own pace. So, whether it is spelling, mental arithmetic or a doctoral thesis, there is something out there for you. And, because so much of it is now in the palm of your hand, it can be wherever you are.

But most of all it can be fun: Enjoyment in itself is a powerful reward. Look at how children learn: they play. As a tutor, I firmly believe in the power of play and enjoyment. I have used Spider Solitaire and Paint for years as an introduction to computers. While the learners are having fun, and learning to use the mouse and the menus, I get a feel for how they learn and encourage them to learn by exploring and discovering for themselves. At the same time, we are establishing a relationship. In play there is little room for fear. While tablets and smart phones don't need the same skills, a little fun can be a way of relaxing into using it – I often use 'knock, knock' jokes to practise using emails.

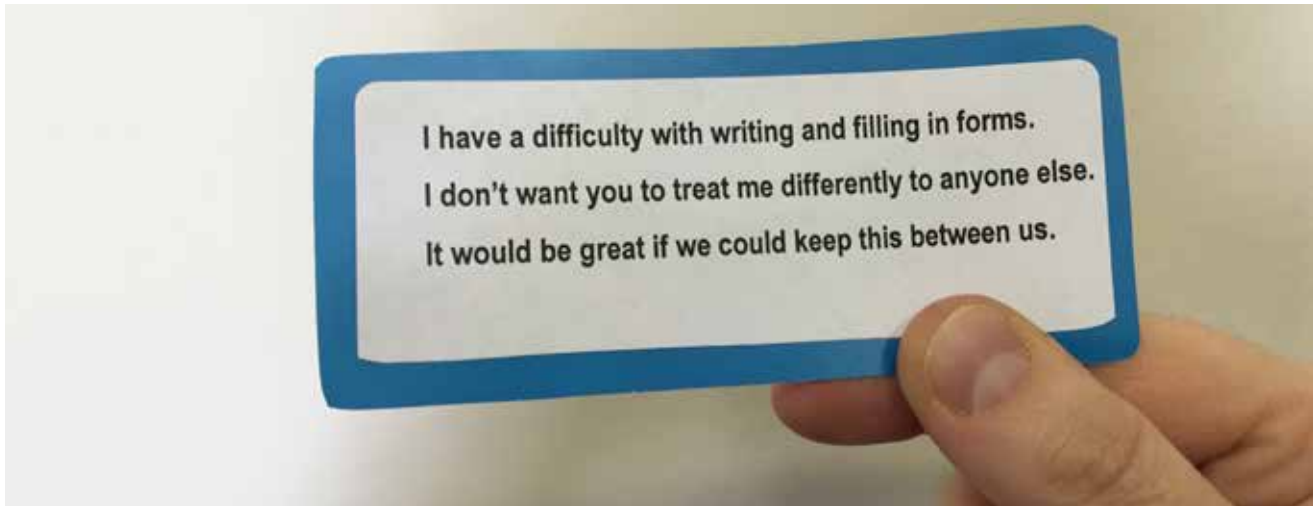
In technology we are all learners – lifelong learners. If we admit that we do not, will not and cannot know it all, both to ourselves and others, it is a liberating thing. And it provides us with a new way of working with and as learners – we learn to learn together.

Anne O'Mahony is an Adult Literacy Tutor with County Cork ETB. She can be contacted at aomahony@eircom.net



A coping strategy for adult literacy learners

By Margaret Howard, Literacy Tutor



As a literacy tutor, it is important to recognise that telling someone you have a literacy difficulty can be very difficult for learners. However, despite this challenge, many find themselves in a situation where they may need assistance with the literacy they encounter within their everyday lives. The '**elevator pitch**' presents learners with a practical technique to talk about their literacy difficulty, when (and if) they feel ready and able to do so. It also assists learners in managing their literacy as opposed to being controlled by it.

How does it work?

A three or four sentence '**pitch**' is developed that explains the learner's literacy difficulties and outlines the help they may need in certain situations. The '**pitch**' is then printed on a credit-sized card and laminated so that the learner can keep it in their wallet and show it to people when they might need assistance with a literacy task.

There are a number of benefits to this activity. It can:

- organise a learner's thoughts;
- prepare the learner for explaining their difficulties, should they need to do so;
- give the learner a feeling of power and control; and
- develop literacy skills.

It is also a useful self-advocating tool and, therefore, encourages independence and confidence, a central aim of literacy tuition.

This strategy was undertaken with a group of learners involved in Adult Basic Education, who were attending courses with Waterford Wexford ETB. The group was very interested in the strategy; several learners participate in workplace training and there was a recurring issue around how to inform course trainers of a literacy difficulty, without attracting attention. It was as a result of these conversations that the strategy was researched and tested.

The development of the pitch took place within the group's weekly literacy classes and followed the plan below:

- Week 1:** Introduce the concept of a pitch and read through some sample pitches together.
- Week 2:** Ask the group to brainstorm phrases or sentences that are important to include in the pitch. Write these up on the board, using the exact phrases and language voiced by the learner.
- Week 3:** Give each group member a copy of the material from Week 2. Ask each learner to choose four sentences to include in their own pitch. Learners write these down and see how they sound when put together.
- Week 4:** Practise reading the pitch, encouraging the learner to change and edit words and phrases until they are happy with the end result.

Here is an example that a group member created:

"I'm not great with the pen. Sometimes I feel under pressure with forms and tests. I might need to say the answers instead of writing them. I'd like to keep this private".

Once the design had taken place, each pitch was typed up, printed out and laminated for future use. The print outs were small and easy to fit into a wallet or pocket, so they could be kept safely until needed. Decisions around the time and situation in which to use the pitch were left completely up to the learners. However, the activity of reflecting on and executing a pitch gave learners a concrete, practical plan for sharing their literacy difficulty with others, when they felt ready to do so.

Student reaction to the pitch activity was very positive. Learners liked the individualised and informal nature of the strategy. Learners spoke about feelings of panic and dread connected to workplace training and believed that this strategy has helped them to feel more relaxed and in control.

Points to note if you are planning to try the elevator pitch with learners:

- The element of choice involved is important to foster ownership of the pitch.
- Don't be tempted to 'improve' on the phrases that learners suggest. Not all phrases or sentences will sound right to every learner. It is important that learners take away a pitch that they are comfortable with.
- The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) website has some suggestions of adult material that could be included in the pitch.
- This activity may not suit learners who are sensitive around confidentiality and the perceived stigma of a literacy difficulty. Notwithstanding, it could be an ideal springboard for a group discussion on these topics.

Margaret Howard is a Literacy Tutor at Waterford Wexford ETB. You can contact Margaret at margarethowardetb@gmail.com



Putting the patient first

By Pauline Wilson, St James's Hospital

Recently St James's Hospital conducted a study on how to make patient information more accessible. They wanted to produce a patient information e-book on the management of acute diabetic foot ulceration based directly upon needs identified by patients and carers.

Focus group research

Firstly, a focus group was arranged for patients and carers who had recent experience of living with acute diabetic foot disease.

Focus group participants were asked to:

- identify areas of management of diabetic foot ulceration on which they felt they had received insufficient information about, and
- areas where they felt the information was too complex.

The results of the focus group were collated and an e-book was composed based on the results.

The chapters of the e-book were based on the feedback from the focus group and were written to be readable by those with a low literacy level.

The e-book was then re-submitted to a different patient panel for final review before it was published.

Results¹

Interestingly, the topics identified by the focus group participants differed from the topics identified by clinicians.

The experience shows that the input of patient opinion on education materials is important and can lead to unexpected suggestions.

Clinicians were surprised by the topics raised by the focus group as some of the topics suggested are currently included in health promotion programmes being delivered.

They were also surprised by the preference for an electronic format when providing patient information. This format was described as having more adaptability, easier legibility, discreet appearance and of easier access for patients and carers.

Conclusion

This project emphasised the importance of including patients or carers in the preparation of patient education literature.

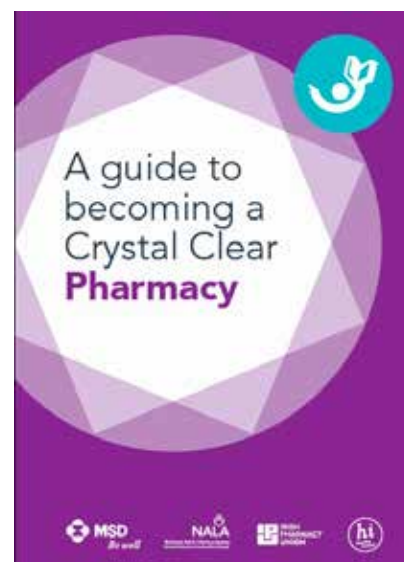
It has also highlighted the importance of considering alternative ways to provide information to patients.

We encourage all clinicians to consider including alternative ways to provide information when creating patient education literature and to include their target audience in all stages of the planning process.

For more information, contact Pauline Wilson at St James's Hospital on PWilson@stjames.ie

¹ This project is limited as patient involvement was through a single focus group.

NALA teams up with Healthy Waterford to help the city become Crystal Clear



In 2010, **Waterford City** became a member of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) European Healthy Cities Network. It is one of only three such cities in Ireland and 100 in Europe. Healthy Waterford aims to improve health and to reduce health inequality by promoting healthy living and providing supportive environments.

NALA was delighted to partner with Healthy Waterford this year as part of our ongoing work to promote health literacy. Health literacy is the ability to read, understand and act on health information. In Ireland, 40% of people have limited health literacy, which means that **4 out of 10** people who use health services find it difficult to understand and act on the health information they receive.

As part of our work with Healthy Waterford, we presented a workshop on health literacy friendly practices last December in the city. Following on from the success of this event, NALA visited Waterford again in February to promote our Crystal Clear mark. The **Crystal Clear mark** is a quality mark developed by NALA, MSD, and the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) to recognise pharmacies and general practices that deliver a health literacy friendly service to their patients. This means that the service takes account of the literacy and numeracy needs of its patients.

We are delighted to say that **Sam McCauley Chemists** became the first pharmacy in the city to be awarded the mark for all of their Waterford pharmacies. They were quickly followed by **Mulligans Chemists**, who were awarded the mark for all eleven of their Waterford pharmacies. Both pharmacy chains are now working to gain the Crystal Clear mark for all of their pharmacies nationally and are delighted to be recognised for the health literacy friendly services that they provide.

It was fantastic to partner with Healthy Waterford to promote health literacy in the city, and they were huge advocates of NALA's work.

If you would like to find out more about the Crystal Clear mark for pharmacies and GPs, please see www.nala.ie/crystalclear

You can contact Helen Ryan, Policy Officer at NALA, at hryan@nala.ie with any questions you have about our work on health literacy.

ESOL students and the QQI standards: Do they work for non native English speakers?



By Fergus Dolan, Literacies Development Worker, NALA

Many 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' or ESOL students in Ireland use the QQI awards for accreditation. The QQI Award is a quality assured award for further and higher education and training in Ireland.

But, is there a bias against second language or non native English speakers using the QQI standards in Ireland? Does this bias against second language speakers also exist in England, Wales and Northern Ireland? And if yes, can aspects of this bias cause problems with assessment, as well as with the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the ESOL classroom?

Frameworks for language learning

If we look at international provision, we find that foreign languages, such as French and Chinese, as well as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have their own standards, curricula and exams. For example, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

The same is true for migrant English language education. Most countries have specific standards which directly reflect migrant needs, for example:

- Scotland's ESOL standards;
- Australia's ISLPR (International Second Language Proficiency Rating); and
- Canada's Benchmarks.

However, countries such as Ireland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland are the exception. These countries use standards for people who speak English as their first language (native speakers) to accredit the language skills of second language speakers.

Dr Philida Schellekens is a respected researcher and teacher trainer in the field of language learning, particularly English language provision for migrants and refugees. She reviewed the merits of this approach and concluded that a single set of standards to measure the skills of first and second language speakers lacked validity.

Native language speakers already know English, its vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Therefore, unless native English speakers have a learning difficulty or a disability, they will be fluent in the language. They know how English works, even if they do not know the rulebook.

What native English speakers in literacy classes mostly need is to extend these skills, for example, to use English in a formal job interview or to improve their writing or spelling.

By contrast, the priority for **second language speakers** is to develop their language competence so that they can communicate. Indeed, there is growing evidence that learners cannot develop speaking, listening, reading and writing skills without the underpinning language competence.

The language versus literacy debate

There has been much concern in the ESOL teaching sector on how best to help students who are not familiar with the Roman script and alphabet. There has been a special focus on those who cannot read and write in their own language. This type of student faces the most significant barriers to learning English as a new language. Thus ESOL practice has tended to focus on developing reading skills and the skills needed to handle a pen and pencil. Yet, there is increasing evidence that the command of a new language is key to the ability to read it.

Dr William Grabe, a linguist from the US, has conducted extensive research in the fields of second language reading and writing development, and skills development for English as a foreign language. His studies indicate that learners transfer some skills from their first language into their second. Mainly this is the pragmatic, phonological and word-decoding knowledge they have learnt in their first language. This explains why learners who can already read, even if another script, master reading English more quickly than people who cannot read at all. However, other skills are not transferable from the first language and need to be in place before learners can tackle reading in their second language.

Other experts in the area, like **Esther Geva** and **Ludo Verhoeven** have come to the conclusion that if a person first learns a well-developed knowledge of syntax, vocabulary, oral proficiency and listening comprehension in the second language, it will then support the development of reading skills in that second language.

The implication for teaching practice is that learners need to develop their speaking and listening skills first, before they can tackle the skills of reading and writing. It also appears that this principle applies to all beginner learners, regardless of their literacy skills in their first language.

The QQI standards in Ireland

The QQI standards in Ireland were written for native English speakers rather than second

language speakers. The standards assume that learners already know how English works and that they have the required vocabulary. Unfortunately, we cannot make these assumptions for second language speakers.

Also, the 'speaking and listening' module of the QQI standards is at a much higher level than the 'reading and writing' module.

Equally, the categorisation of 'speaking and listening' in the QQI standards as **one skill** (and module) is problematic, as in ESOL 'listening' develops ahead of 'speaking', especially at the beginner level.

So, does the bias against second language speakers using the QQI standards really matter? I think the answer is yes and that this practice causes major problems not only with assessment, but also with the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the classroom.

To overcome the barrier of inappropriate assessment, QQI, SOLAS and its partners may wish to explore the potential for an alternative. For example, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is an obvious option. It is adopted across the world and it benefits from a vast range of research to validate language levels.

Hopefully these issues can be addressed and resolved following the completion of the QQI Review of Levels 1-3 and the development of a national ESOL Policy Framework.

Email Fergus Dolan at fdolan@nala.ie if you have any thoughts or suggestions on this article.

Review of Levels 1 to 3

All Levels 1-3 award specifications are currently under review by the QQI and the language issue is being addressed in this review. Also, the State is committed to the development of an ESOL policy Framework and SOLAS has begun this work.

Talking, tweeting and texting at NALA's Tutors Forum



Laura Howe, Julie Goreham, Anne O'Mahony and Jim Divine all spoke at the Tutors Forum



There was a great turnout at our National Forum for Adult Literacy Tutors in January. Over 120 tutors travelled from near and far to attend the event which was held in the Aisling Hotel in Dublin. The theme was integrating technology into adult literacy and numeracy work and everyone got involved talking, tweeting and texting at the event.

Jim Devine from 'Devine: Policy | Projects | Innovation' opened and chaired the forum. He set the scene by talking about how if social media is used smartly, it can contribute positively to literacy and numeracy teaching and learning. He also discussed how smart phones can be a distraction and just because many people have one, it does not mean that they have crossed the digital divide.

Rosemarie McGill, Development Officer with Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB got the crowd buzzing by asking participants to talk about their earliest experiences of literacy and numeracy. It was an ideal ice-breaker and some great examples were tweeted from the floor. Many mentioned seeing coins

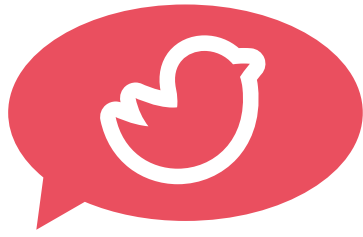
and using money as their first introduction to numeracy.

Julie Goreham, the Digital Engagement Team Leader with the Campaign for Learning in the UK spoke about using technology when you have limited equipment and connectivity. She suggested that tutors could:

1. work with students on power-point presentations,
2. use BYOD (bring your own device) and start with basic activities such as calendar or phone to-do list (even on an old Nokia), or
3. visit a library or centre that has those resources.

"In relation to the calendar function ask the learners to set a reminder for the next learning session. Most devices have a note section or to-do list. The learners can use this for a list of objectives of the session. Most devices also have an audio option. Learners can use this to record their learning at the end of the session," said Julie.

Julie also encouraged tutors to talk to learners about e-safety and have a



discussion on the subject that not everything online may be true. She suggested that tutors should develop a glossary of terms for technology or show and explain to learners technology symbols like 'refresh'. Her final point was that tutors could help learners with technology by pointing them in the right direction and motivating them to use some technology.

Laura Howe spoke about an 'Older voices Online' digital advocacy and activism project that she developed with An Cosan, a Community Education Centre in Tallaght. She pointed out that social media can be very empowering for people and gave an example of a group of students who were wheelchair users whom she was working with. They were very unhappy with the local council for not cutting the grass and making it difficult for them to access a park. So, Laura encouraged the students to voice their frustration on facebook and the result was that the council cut the grass! In this instance she said that the students used facebook to motivate people to take action, raise awareness and create positive change.

Finally, it was over to **Anne O'Mahony**, an adult literacy tutor with County Cork ETB who spoke about taking away the fear of using technology for both students and tutors. Fear for tutors may be a fear of the unknown or that sometimes students will know more than the tutors. Some tutors fear losing face. Fear for students could be that they'll 'lose everything' or their device will crash or burn.

"As a tutor, once you've identified the risks, look at the rewards. You'll have to try to get adults to play 'like children'. If they lose their inhibitions, then there is a much better chance that they'll learn more," said Anne. (You can read more of Anne's advice on page eight).



Margaret Ryan and Martin Fahy, Educational Services to Prisons



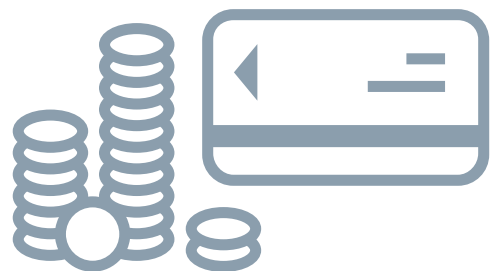
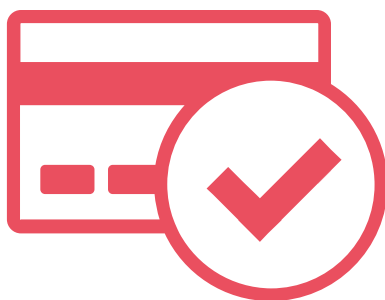
Pauline O'Donovan and Catherine O'Keefe, VTOS Kilkenny and Tullamore.

After the morning session, the tutors broke-up for a large choice of workshops which were running before and after lunch. These included assistive technology, using Ted Talks and Khan Academy, Google apps and Chrome books for education.

Since the event, we've received great feedback and would like to take this opportunity to thank all the speakers and tutors who got involved in the day.

If you missed the event you can watch short interviews with some of the speakers at www.nala.ie/tutors/continuous-professional-development/videos/all

Case studies of financial numeracy practice in Ireland



Last year, NALA worked with a range of tutors to document some of the great teaching practices in adult learning centres around the country. We focused on the area of numeracy because of its essential role in using and understanding money.

The result is a new report called 'A wealth of practice: case studies of financial numeracy practice in Ireland'. It outlines six case studies that describe in detail the work of tutors to improve adult learners' financial skills, knowledge and understanding.

The practices were collected at six adult learning services and include:

1. Parnell Adult Education Centre, Dublin;
2. National Learning Network, Navan;
3. Word Aid, Kilkenny;
4. National Learning Network, Longford;
5. Further Education and Training Centre, Naas; and
6. Tuam Adult Basic Education Service

Here is an excerpt from Case Study 1: Parnell Adult Education Centre, Dublin

The tutor

The tutor, Maria Gibbs, works in the Parnell Centre and a number of its outreach centres. She teaches both literacy and numeracy to groups of adults at Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Levels 2 to 4.

Introducing money into learning and teaching

Maria aims to bring money into her teaching and learning at every level. She stresses the importance of money as a context for understanding and applying numeracy skills, saying: "I think people understand money. They understand basic addition with money, getting change, being able to count out in numbers".

In the report Maria gives examples of topics where she has reinforced learning by using money examples. "If I'm looking at positive and negative numbers, money is the way to go. If you have €5 and you need to spend €7, you're going to owe somebody €2 so you're minus €2. They can see it with a number line going up or down or even just in a bank account with money going in and money going out," says Maria.

Teaching Managing Personal Finances at Level 3

In addition to teaching literacy and numeracy, Maria teaches the QQI module Managing Personal Finances at Level 3. She finds that learners can become very engaged in this qualification.

"I find a lot of people really enjoy it because you're getting onto the MABS and National Consumer Agency websites. It's not just adding and subtraction. I do a particular activity at the moment – there's a lot of advertising about buying a new car and personal finance plans," says Marie.

As part of this activity Maria and her learners consider whether a personal finance plan with a car company (involving small monthly repayments but a large balloon payment at the end) is a sensible option compared to a loan from a credit union.

She says: "The learners find it very interesting because they can see the pluses and minuses to both and then they decide which is the better one for them. In addition, the learners go onto price comparison sites, such as www.bonkers.ie to compare prices for mobile phones and utilities. The learners look at the benefits and problems in paying for electricity using a pay-as-you-go card. They consider the advantages of being able to manage money carefully, but also consider the fact that they tend to pay a higher price in the end for the electricity they use."

As well as looking at these issues, Maria encourages the learners to consider their personal interests and hobbies, such as sports, and how much they spend on them each week.

One project with a group was to organise a 'Come Dine with Me' activity, based on the television programme where a group of people eat at each other's homes during the same week and score their hosts' cooking.

"We brought in cookery books to choose the menu. They had to go out and price the menu. We'd also say how many people were going. Would we have to increase the recipes? How many bottles of wine would we need, how many glasses of wine for each person, how much would a glass hold?"

Maria is aware of the sensitivities around asking people to talk about their personal finances. To get around this, she tries to use case studies. For example, about the financial circumstances of different family groups: one involving a single parent with a number of children; another featuring a couple where one person is working. The learning then focuses on these fictional, but realistic, situations.

Use of resources

Where she can, Maria also uses real life items, such as credit union or banking leaflets. "When the water charges came in we did a great bit of work on that early on. It caused great fun in the Communications group, looking at the cost and what was expected," says Maria.

We would like to thank all the tutors who contributed and gave their time and ideas to the publication 'A wealth of practice: case studies of financial numeracy practice in Ireland'.

You can download the report for free at www.nala.ie

NALA's Plain English Campaign – off to a good start

Since 2014, NALA has run a dedicated Plain English Campaign to raise the public's awareness and support for plain English. The campaign has three core strands:

1. Plain English Petition
2. Plain English Awards
3. General promotion around the need for plain English.

Let's look at progress on each of these strands since the start of the year.

Plain English Petition

In January, NALA was proud to present Minister Howlin with 5,000 signatures from the general public. The signatures – gathered through our online petition – called on the Government and its agencies to use more plain English in documents intended for the public. Meeting with the Minister and his colleagues put a spotlight on the growing public awareness of, and demand for, ethical and clear information in plain English.

Following our meeting with Minister Howlin, we have received contact details for personnel in a number of government departments to further help us promote the importance of plain English for everyone but particularly for people with literacy needs. So far, we have met with two government departments this year and hope to meet with more in the coming months.



5,000
signatures
on the Plain
English Petition



Inez Bailey, CEO, NALA and Minister Brendan Howlin holding the petition at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.



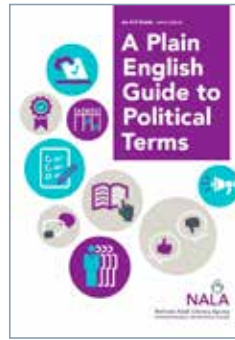
Plain English Awards

Last year, we ran Ireland's first and very successful Plain English Awards. The Awards were sponsored by leading law firm, Mason Hayes & Curran. This year we are planning Ireland's second Plain English Awards. We expect the Awards to again achieve significant media coverage and to showcase organisations who are providing clear written and online information.

Interestingly, clients of our Plain English Editing and Training Service have also been winning other awards on the back of their work with us in plain English. For example, in February of this year, Longford County Council scooped a top Irish Planning Award for its current Development Plan. (We were told that the NALA Plain English Mark on the executive summaries in this Plan was a central factor in the final decision.)

General promotion around the usefulness of plain English

NALA continues to grow the demand for plain English through its general communications – including online media. Last year, we were surprised at the high response by members of the public to our plain English related posts on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. We are going to build on this success while continuing to grow understanding of plain English through our printed publications – such as the one you are reading now!



The publication of our updated **A-Z Plain English Guide to Political Terms** right before the election also helped our plain English campaigning work.

'Bandwagon effect', 'Dark horse candidate' and 'Mudslinging' are just some of the terms explained in the guide which was written to help the public become more familiar with some of the most common political terms. We also encouraged political parties to use less jargon and to be more aware of the issues faced by the one in six adults with literacy difficulties in Ireland. While political jargon allows politicians to talk about issues in a quicker, coded way, it can also act as a real barrier for people accessing information.

This new guide is housed on our plain English website (www.simplyput.ie) and it is a very popular resource for adult literacy tutors, adult literacy students and others.

Share your views on our Plain English Campaign

Thank you for your support for our Plain English Campaign to date. We want to keep our campaign fresh and invite you to share ideas with us about how to further build our campaign. We want the public to expect information to be written in plain English. If you have any ideas about how to strengthen our campaign, please let us know.

Email Claire O'Riordan, NALA's Plain English Coordinator at coriordan@nala.ie

New literacy and numeracy awareness campaign

A key element of Ireland's **National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy** is to 'improve literacy and numeracy levels among the adult population'. To achieve this, SOLAS (the Further Education and Training Authority), together with its strategic partners, will run a series of awareness-raising campaigns between now and 2019.

To this end, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is coordinating a new National Literacy and Numeracy Awareness campaign which will run in 2016.

The **aim** of our campaign is to improve literacy and numeracy levels amongst the adult population with a particular focus on providing individuals with the necessary competencies to achieve their **personal, social, career and employment aspirations**.

Specifically, the objectives of our literacy and numeracy awareness raising campaign will be to:

- **raise awareness of the importance and benefits of having good literacy and numeracy skills for everyday life;**
- **promote engagement with existing services, campaigns and stakeholders working in this area; and**
- **provide easy access to adult literacy and numeracy resources that allow individuals to direct their own learning.**

Priority **target groups** will include workers, long-term unemployed persons, lone parents, and unemployed or inactive youth, particularly those who have yet to achieve certification up to Level 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Speaking about the new campaign, Clare McNally, NALA's Communications Manager said: "Early this year we commissioned



research to inform this campaign. We spoke to early school leavers, unemployed people and others about their attitudes to education and what would motivate them to return to education. Now we are in the process of using the findings from this research and working with an advertising agency to design a new campaign that encourages individuals to improve their literacy and numeracy skills."

"We know there are already a wide range of statutory and voluntary groups supporting the literacy and numeracy development of adults, for example ETBs, libraries, workplaces and other settings. Therefore we want to design a campaign that will be overarching and broad based, complementing the work already being done," said Clare.

SOLAS has also established a **Steering Committee** of strategic partners to support the roll out of this new campaign in 2016. The Steering Committee members consist of key stakeholders who currently contribute to national policies that support adults to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in Ireland.

For more information contact Clare McNally, Communications Manager, NALA at media@nala.ie

National Skills Strategy launched



Taoiseach Enda Kenny with Tánaiste Joan Burton at the launch of Ireland's Future - the National Skills Strategy to 2025

There was an impressive turnout at the launch of the Government's National Skills Strategy in January. Front of stage were the Taoiseach Enda Kenny, Tánaiste Joan Burton, Minister for Education and Skills Jan O'Sullivan and Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation Damien English, who all launched the new document.

The Strategy identifies Ireland's current skills profile and provides a strategic vision and specific objectives for Ireland's future skills requirements. Importantly, the new strategy also sets out a road map for how the vision and objectives can be achieved.

Here in NALA, we were delighted to see targets set to improve adult literacy and numeracy levels and to see a particular focus on supporting those below level 3 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

The strategy set targets of:

Measure	Currently	Target for 2025	Upskilling target
Number of adults scoring at Level 1 or below for literacy	17.5% 521,552	12% 357,636	Decrease by 5.5% which means upskilling 163,916 people
Number of adults scoring at Level 1 or below for numeracy	25.6% 762,956	17% 506,651	Decrease by 8.6% which means upskilling 256,305 people

You can read the report at <http://bit.ly/20dv5y9>

Lifelong learning

The National Skills Strategy also highlighted that Irish people participate less in lifelong learning compared to their EU counterparts (6.7% compared to an EU average of 10.7%). There are even lower participation rates among Irish people in employment (5.5% compared to an EU average of 11.6%).

Lifelong learning brings benefits to the individual, to society and to employers. The continuous training and up-skilling of people in the workforce will help to maintain the competitiveness of Irish companies and make Ireland an attractive location for investment.

Given the importance of lifelong learning, this new strategy has an increased focus on lifelong learning and a target to increase participation in lifelong learning among 25-64 year-olds to 15% by 2025.

Health and wellbeing for life: A literacy-friendly programme for older people

by Bláthnaid Ni Chinnéde, NALA and Maria Finn,
South Dublin County Council



The National Positive Ageing Strategy outlines Ireland's vision for older people and sets out a number of goals and objectives that are needed to promote positive ageing. One of the goals is to promote access to a range of educational opportunities for older people, taking account of literacy and numeracy issues. South Dublin County Council (SDCC) is currently coordinating the Positive Ageing Initiative in South County Dublin.

In 2015, the SDCC Department of Housing, Social and Community Development asked NALA to design a 'literacy-friendly' health and wellbeing programme for older people. The aim of the programme was to increase the participants' knowledge and understanding of health-related topics, in a way that takes account of literacy and numeracy issues.

NALA designed the programme as a 16-hour **introductory** course, delivered in eight two-hour sessions. The sessions were themed as follows:

1. General health and wellbeing
2. Exploring types of health and wellbeing
3. Physical activity
4. Healthy eating
5. Brain health and memory
6. Communicating in health settings
7. Using technology
8. Keeping yourself well

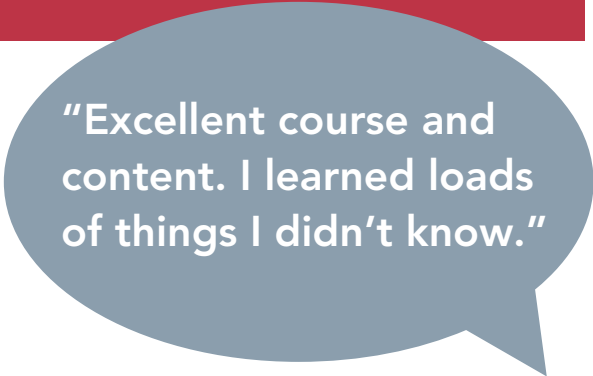
The pilot programme

SDCC recruited eight participants for the pilot programme, which started in Health and Wellbeing Week in September 2015.

The pilot was delivered in **An Cosán Community Education Centre** in Tallaght, by tutors Deirdre Bannon and Eithne Dunne, with support from NALA. Their care and skill in facilitating adult learning and literacy was crucial to the success of the pilot, as was the centre's welcoming and affirming environment and culture. Experts in particular areas of health and wellbeing contributed greatly to the programme as guest facilitators. These included Ciara Langan and Ciara Murray, HSE Occupational Therapists from Mary Mercer Clinic in Tallaght, and David Nagle, Physical Activity Leader.

Print and online **materials** used on the pilot programme included HSE health information and promotion publications, NALA health literacy packs, and materials from South Dublin County Sports Partnership. Tutors and participants also sourced or created materials relating to the various topics and to the group's particular interests.

In each session participants shared their experience and knowledge of the relevant topic and used a range of active learning methods to explore it - these included role play, collage, music and poetry. While each session focused on a specific topic, health and wellbeing were also built into the **process** used on the programme. Each session included opportunities for personal reflection, relaxation, physical activity, social interaction, and planning for health and wellbeing – with a healthy dose of enjoyment and fun! In each session, tutors and participants addressed language, literacy and numeracy as relevant to the topic and to participants' needs.



“Excellent course and content. I learned loads of things I didn't know.”

The pilot programme ended in Social Inclusion Week in November 2015 with a celebratory event and presentation of certificates. At this event, participants shared their experience and assessment of the course with representatives from SDCC, NALA and An Cosán.

Outcomes and next steps

Participants and tutors evaluated each session and the programme as a whole. They reported that it had met the programme objectives and that the participants had met their own personal objectives for the programme. (The participants had written their personal, confidential goals and hopes for the programme in the first session.)

The main recommendations were to increase the length of the programme, to make it available for other groups and to develop a follow-up course for those who completed the introductory course.

Update

At the beginning of this year SDCC commissioned NALA to help implement these recommendations in cooperation with An Cosán. We are delighted that on 6 April, a new group of older people started the programme, now a 25-hour programme delivered over ten sessions. This will be followed in the Autumn by a literacy-friendly advanced programme in health and wellbeing for older people.

SDCC has been recognised for its commitment to literacy-friendly service delivery, winning a Chambers Ireland Excellence in Local Government Award in 2013 for its work on this.

General Election 2016



Before the general election we met all of the political parties and asked them to include adult literacy development in their election manifestos.

We were delighted that our work paid off and that four political parties prioritised adult literacy in their election manifestos. Here's what they said:

Fine Gael

"Fine Gael recognises that low levels of proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem solving can have a negative impact upon a person's social and health outcomes. We will improve access routes to learning to ensure that those with low qualifications or skills are not left behind".

Labour

"In a modern economy, many people need to continually upskill and reskill throughout their lives. We will provide an increased fund of €5m each year to enhance the availability of lifelong learning options in the community, from literacy and numeracy education for those who want to avail of catch-up training, to specific skills training options for those who are looking to reskill in their spare time. Our ambition is threefold; we want to eradicate illiteracy, afford existing workers the opportunity for second chance education and equip workers with the necessary skills and training to be able to adapt to the skills of the future. Ultimately, this is about supporting people in their ambition to progress and improve their livelihoods to benefit themselves and their families."

Sinn Féin

"We will promote adult literacy by providing opportunities for 20,000 learners to participate in a course leading to a Level 3 or Junior Cert qualification."

Social Democrats

"Literacy is key to unlocking other areas of learning. It is simply unacceptable that 44% of pupils in the most disadvantaged primary schools perform at or below the lowest levels of reading proficiency. Parents play the most fundamental role in children's learning and it is essential that they are given the supports they need to do this. Social Democrats would invest in the delivery, by schools, community organisations and others, of a range of programmes and initiatives to engage and support parents in their children's learning and development."

The Green Party manifesto is almost there...

"Increase participation in Further Education, especially for disadvantaged communities and increase the standard and scope of post-leaving certificate and vocational training, and remove the cap on plc places."

NALA will continue to engage with the political parties to promote adult literacy development and to help them prioritise and implement the promises they have made during Election 2016.

Now all we need is a government!

47 Years

by Liam Cleere

I was sitting at the table with herself "The Boss" the other day, we were doing a bit of internet research into our family history. Davina "The Boss" was on the laptop, reading out something and I was going to take it down. I got my jotter down from the shelf and clicked my pen. I began to write and slowly the ink began to get lighter in colour before fading altogether, "Hold on a bit" I said "I need to get another pen." It was then that I noticed something special about my pen. I opened it to be sure and I was. It was all used up, dry of ink! Not a big deal to most people perhaps, but it was to me!

You see in all my life before I have never used up an entire pen, never! There was nothing really special about that pen, 4 for 2 in the boot sale and I have other pens, lots of them but that was the pen I used to write most with. I did homework with it, wrote

stories and my first poem with it, took notes and maybe doodled a bit. It was always within reach of my hand at the table. I must have written my name 200 times with it, to get it right. My writing improved a lot in the lifetime of that pen.

I have replaced my pen with another one now. I'm writing this with it and hopefully I will use it as much as my old pen. It took 47 years for me to use it up, well not really 47 but seen as I'm only writing a couple of years you could say it did. I'm proud that I have used up a full pen, never thought I would, not 2 years ago anyway. I'm looking forward to using up more pens, doing a lot more story writing, notes for the boss Woman and maybe just a little bit of doodling.

Liam Cleere is a student of Tipperary ETB's Adult Learning Scheme in Killenaule centre.



Great turnout and discussion at our AGM



We were delighted to see so many of our members at our AGM in Kilkenny last Saturday. There was a great atmosphere at the event as colleagues took the opportunity to catch up with each other and share their views.

The proposed new Constitution and Procedural Rules were passed unanimously which means we will meet our requirements under the 2014 Companies Act. And, there were two successful nominations to the NALA Board:

- Denis Foley, Councillor, Carlow (nominated by ETBI and elected to Board)
- Mary Bambrick, Volunteer Adult Literacy and Numeracy Tutor, City of Dublin Education and Training Board (re-elected to Board)

Importantly, we had our first consultation about our new three-year Strategic Plan. We got valuable feedback from members which will influence the direction we take from 2017-2019.

A sincere thanks to the outgoing members of the NALA Board - Mairin Kenny, Mary Hilda Kavanagh, Frank Locke, Bernadette Hurley and Theresa Byrne who have given their time so generously to NALA and to improving adult literacy and numeracy outcomes in Ireland.

Finally, thank you to everyone who joined us on the day. It was great to see you and we really appreciate your ongoing support of our work.



Other news



Introducing Tom O'Brien



Tom O'Brien, Services, Research and Development Manager

We are pleased to announce that Tom O'Brien has been appointed as Services, Research and Development Manager in NALA. In this new role Tom will be responsible for a variety of tasks to include policy development, nationwide service delivery, research and development, as well as training and education. Previously Tom worked in Sankalpa, an Addiction Service in Dublin. He also teaches part time on the Certificate in Addiction for the Department of Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University. He has a MA and PhD in Adult and Community Education focusing on the challenges of early school leaving and addiction. Tom is from Wicklow, but has lived in Kerry, Spain and more recently in Dublin.

Life after boxing

We are working with the Irish Athletic Boxing Association and the Irish Institute of Sport to deliver five workshops on communication skills. These workshops are looking at 'Life after boxing' and the skills the participants will need to pursue further education and employment if they need to. For example, career planning, preparing for work, CVs and interviews, writing documents and planning your finances. We are really excited about this new joint venture and look forward to telling you more about the project. No doubt we will learn as much from the participants as they will from us.

NALA Strategic Plan 2017-2019

We are starting the research and planning phase for our next three-year strategic plan. This new plan will set out how we aim to provide solutions to improve outcomes for adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties and highlight the value of improved literacy and numeracy skills to Ireland's social and economic development. Over the coming months we will be talking to all our members, policy makers, practitioners and learners to inform the direction that we take. Keep an eye on our monthly e-zine for more information.

New sponsorship from Eirgrid

We are delighted to get sponsorship from Eirgrid to develop a new family literacy resource pack. The aim of the pack will be to provide parents and guardians with tips and ideas about how they can support their child's literacy and numeracy development. We hope to distribute the pack to parents who have children in DEIS schools. These are schools specially designated to meet the education needs of children from disadvantaged communities.

1916 Celebrations



As part of the 1916 celebrations, Paula Meehan recited her poem 'Literacy Class, South Inner City' on an RTÉ radio show called 'Poems of Ireland since 1916'. It was broadcast live on Easter Monday from the Royal College of Surgeons. The poem, which reflects a literacy learner's journey was commissioned by NALA back in 1998 and Paula told listeners that it was inspired by Ursula Coleman who was pivotal to literacy work and NALA during those years. Paula is the current Ireland Professor of Poetry. She was born in Dublin where she still lives. Besides six award-winning poetry collections she has also written plays for both adults and children. You can listen back to this powerful recitation on http://www.rte.ie/radio1/podcast/podcast_playback.xml or read it here:

Literacy Class, South Inner City, 1987

by Paula Meehan

One remembers welts festering on her palm
She'd spelt "sacrament" wrong. Seven years of age,
preparing for Holy Communion. Another is calm
describing the exact humiliation, forty years on, the rage

at wearing her knickers on her head one interminable day
for the crime of wetting herself. Another swears she was punch drunk
most her schooldays – clattered about the ears, made to say
*I am stupid; my head's a sieve. I don't know how to think.
I don't deserve to live.*

Late November, the dark
chill of the room, Christmas looming and none of us well fixed
We bend each evening in scarves and coats to the work
of mending what is broken in us. Without tricks,

without wiles, with no time to waste now, we plant
words on these blank fields. It's an unmapped world
and we are pioneering agronomists launched onto this strange planet,
the sad flag of the home place newly unfurled.

Join NALA

Be part of NALA's campaign to ensure people with literacy difficulties can fully take part in society and can access learning opportunities that meets their needs.

Benefits of membership:

- Get extra funding through our Student Development Fund
- Access QQI accreditation using our Distance Learning Service
- Get discounts on our plain English editing and training service
- Receive free promotional materials and access to NALA resources
- Get discounts on NALA conferences

Become a member
of NALA today
Call us 01 412 7900
or visit www.nala.ie

"Being a member gives me access to excellent content and resources."



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

National Adult Literacy Agency
Sandford Lodge,
Sandford Close,
Ranelagh, Dublin 6

Tel: 01 412 7900
Web: www.nala.ie
Email: info@nala.ie