

Literacy Matters

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



Take the first step

This year's national awareness campaign promoted the availability of local ETB adult education services.

Also:

- President Michael D Higgins holds special event for learners and tutors
- Taking the fear out of everyday technology
- How tutors can look after their wellbeing

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Welcome

Welcome to our latest edition of Literacy Matters.

In September, NALA managed the second phase of the 'Take the first step' awareness campaign. New elements in this year's campaign included regional radio ads to emphasise the availability of local Education and Training Board (ETB) adult education services. You can read more about the campaign on page four.

We were delighted that President Michael D Higgins held a special reception for learners and tutors during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week. To read about their visit to Áras an Uachtaráin, please see page 10.

Earlier this year, we put out a call for students to join a Learner Ambassador programme. The programme is run by NALA with the aim of supporting students who promote the services provided by their local ETB. On page eight, you can read about the promotional work carried out so far by some of the new Learner Ambassadors.

We always enjoy sharing the inspiring stories from people who have taken the brave step to return to education. On page 12, you can read about the achievements of Joe McDonagh, a learner from Limerick and Clare ETB. On page 14, Michelle Johnston, a learner from Cavan and Monaghan ETB, talks about her plans for the future.

On page 16, Helen Walsh, a tutor from Kilkenny and Carlow ETB, talks about an innovative family learning project. On Page 18, we look at how tutors in Bray are using free online tools to improve the skills learners need for everyday living. Also, on page 26, Caroline Martin from City of Dublin ETB, talks about how tutors can look after their own health and wellbeing.

We would be delighted to hear from you if you have a story that you would like to share in the next Literacy Matters. To get in touch please just send an email to media@nala.ie

Until next time, we hope you have a lovely Christmas and a happy new year.

Best wishes from all the team at NALA.





Pictured at the launch of the campaign are learners Olive Phelan and Lee Mitchell with Richard Bruton, Minister for Education and Skills.

One step at a time

This year's 'Take the first step' campaign was created following feedback and input from literacy centres around the country.

"Education is the best asset people can have to prepare for the future," said Richard Bruton, Minister for Education and Skills, as he launched this year's National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Awareness Campaign.

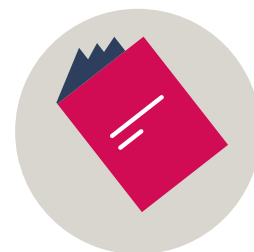
The campaign, which ran from International Literacy Day on 8 September until 21 September, was called 'Take the first step'. It was the second phase of the 'Take the

first step' campaign that began last year. It included national and regional radio advertising, video, digital and outdoor advertising as well as print and public relations (PR) activity.

All national advertising and PR activity encouraged people interested in improving their basic skills to 'Take the first step' and call the freephone number 1800 20 20 65, text LEARN to 50050 or log onto

“There were times when I wanted to walk away. But then I thought, ‘no, put one foot through the door, put the other one behind it and go for it’.”

Donna Murray



takefirststep.ie. Once they called or texted, NALA put them in contact with their local Education and Training Board (ETB) adult education centre or told them about other free services that would help them meet their needs.

“Often people who return to education say the hardest part was making the first call or taking the first step into an adult education centre,” says Inez Bailey, CEO, NALA.

“The aim of this campaign was to encourage people to take that difficult first step to get the help they need. We wanted people to know they are not alone and we wanted them to know that there are lots of free classes around the country to suit their needs.”

National and regional focus

Similar to last year, this year’s campaign used advertising and PR activity to promote the stories of four people who had addressed their literacy difficulties with the objective of encouraging others to reap the rewards by doing the same. The four ETB students who featured in the campaign were: Eamon Delaney from Kilkenny; Chris Carthy from Sligo; Gerardine Dunphy from Meath; and Tony Moloney from Cork.

However, this year’s campaign also saw the addition of some new elements.

“For this year’s campaign, adult literacy centres recommended that we emphasise the availability of local ETB adult education services. To achieve this, NALA produced regional radio ads and offered ETBs posters and PR to promote local services,” says Clare McNally, communications manager, NALA.

“For the regional radio ads, NALA worked in collaboration with Urban Media, a radio and online media syndicating agency. Together we produced six ads promoting local ETB services and phone numbers.”

The ETBs that were promoted, along with their radio stations, were:

- City of Dublin ETB on FM104;
- Cork ETB on 96FM;
- Limerick ETB on 95FM;
- Louth and Meath ETB on LMFM;
- Galway and Roscommon ETB on Galway Bay FM; and
- Waterford and Wexford ETB on WLRFM.

The six local radio ads were 40-second, interview style vox-pops, with three students from each ETB talking about how going back to education had benefited them. This provided an opportunity to use local learners to promote local ETB services. Each radio advert ended with details of the local ETB phone number to contact for further information on courses.

Reaching young people

Our partnership with Urban Media also enabled us to produce a new video of students talking about the benefits of returning to education. The video, which was accompanied by learner interviews and facts about literacy, was shared on all of Urban Media's radio stations' social media and proved very popular with young people.

Donna Murray, who is in her 30s, is one of the learners who took part in the promotional video. She says that taking her first step back to education scared her but the rewards have been more than worth it.

"There were times when I thought 'this isn't for me' and I wanted to walk away. But then I thought 'no, put one foot through the door, put the other one in behind it and go for it'. Since then the simplest little things have been life-changing for me. Now I'm able to use a measuring tape and understand a word on the telly that I hadn't known before. I can now relate to people better and I've achieved the confidence to know that anything is possible," says Donna.

"I can now relate to people better and I've achieved the confidence to know that anything is possible."

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During this year's campaign, NALA also invested in a paid Facebook campaign to support the promotion of literacy services to young people.

Posters for centres

Once again, NALA offered all ETBs and adult literacy centres or services posters with local contact phone numbers, websites and corresponding ETB logos. We were delighted that so many ETBs and centres around the country took us up on our offer.

In total, 72 centres ordered posters with local contact details while 71 centres ordered generic posters with national contact details.

A strategic approach

The campaign was funded by SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority of Ireland, and was managed by NALA. It was a key action in Ireland's Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2014 – 2019, which sets out to meet the training needs of Ireland's labour market and society. The campaign was supported by a range of stakeholders through a national steering committee.



Donna Murray

The campaign in numbers

250

NALA provided information to **250** people about their local ETB adult education service.

95

Another **95** people called the ETBs that participated in the regional radio advertising campaign.

2,400

2,400 promotional posters were sent to literacy services around the country.

30,000

30,000 campaign leaflets were sent to literacy centres and given out at events.

50%

There was a significant increase to the main campaign website takethefirststep.ie with about a **50%** increase in sessions and new users.

37%

An independent evaluation of the campaign showed that **37%** of the total population recall the campaign, which is up from 34% in 2016.

35

The biggest increases in awareness since last year are among people under **35** and those experiencing literacy or numeracy difficulties.

2 in 3

Two in three people who experience difficulties reported seeing the campaign.

A huge thank you!

We are very grateful to the many people who once again helped us make the awareness campaign a success. We would like to say thank you to all of the ETB students who took part in recording the radio and video ads: Liz Carey, Tony Moloney and Margaret Scully from Cork; Catherine Gavin, Olive Phelan and Rita Murphy from Dublin; Rosaleen Rice, John Williams, Kenneth Kennellan and Marion Higgins from Galway; Maurice Sammon, Rosaleen O'Neill, Ann Johnston and Bernie Sherlock from Waterford; Tanya Byrne and Lee Mitchell from Wicklow; Joe McDonagh, Angela Gleeson, Pam Noonan and Terence Conway from Limerick; Rita Pepper, Martina Leslie and Solo Sanogo from Louth; and Catherine Devlin from Donegal.

Thank you also to all the ETBs, ALOs and tutors who supported the campaign, including those who put us in contact with students: Kevin Kelly, Alison Jones, Emma Tobin Coles, Joann Power, Lorraine Markham, Mary Dunne and Maria Morgan. Thank you to Mary Maher and everybody in Dublin Adult Literacy Centre for allowing us to film the video ad there. We would also like to thank the students who were profiled in the campaign: Tony Moloney, Chris Carthy, Eamon Delaney and Gerardine Dunphy. And as always, a very special thanks to our students, especially the members of our student subcommittee for their tireless hard work and enthusiasm throughout the campaign.





Learners at the event included Stephen McGaughran, Michelle Johnston, Rosaleen O'Neill, Olive Phelan and Maurice Sammon.

Telling their own story

Students from around the country got together in June to find out how they can help people return to education.



When it comes to encouraging people to return to education, nobody is better placed than those who faced the same challenges and fears themselves.

With this in mind, earlier this year NALA put out a call for people who were interested in joining a Learner Ambassador programme. The programme is run by NALA with the aim of supporting students promote the services provided by their local Education and Training Board (ETB).

A Learner Ambassador is a student who shares their story about the benefits of returning to education with people in their community. By doing this they often motivate others to take up a learning opportunity.

We had a great response and, in June, 35 students came together for an information and training session in Dublin. They came

from adult education centres all over the country to learn how to tell their own inspirational stories and encourage other people to return to education.

At the event, students took part in a very engaging workshop given by William Corless, a personal coach and corporate trainer. William, who specialises in communication and presentation skills, introduced the students to a whole range of easy-to-remember techniques that they could use when telling their own story about returning to education.

The students who attended the event also got the opportunity to meet and hear from the members of NALA's student subcommittee. These students have regularly shared their stories at events and in the media and they were happy to give advice to the new Learner Ambassadors.

Tanya Byrne, a student from Wicklow, found the workshop very useful. "I took loads of notes which will be of great benefit in making me more confident when speaking in public. Everyone I spoke to on the day enjoyed it and we all got something positive from the workshop," she says.

William also spoke to the students about how to identify opportunities to promote education within groups, associations or networks they are involved in. He showed the new Learner Ambassadors how they have a unique opportunity to encourage other people who may be thinking about doing a course to take that first step and do one of the many classes organised by their local ETB.

The students found William's advice very useful and, since the event in June, several of them have shared their own personal story about returning to education at lots of different events around the country.

In August, Stephen McGaughran and Michelle Johnston, from Cavan and Monaghan ETB, got the ball rolling by chatting to people who visited NALA's stand at the Virginia Agricultural Show in Cavan. As well as this, Michelle gave a literacy awareness talk at a training event for tutors in Cavan and she also got a rapturous reception when she shared her inspirational story with an audience of 150 people who came to a graduation event for Cavan learners. Both of these events were organised by Cavan and Monaghan ETB.

In September, Gerard Maher, from Tipperary ETB, shared his story with 120 people who attended an event about adult education and training opportunities. The event was organised by Tipperary ETB and the local office of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Many Learner Ambassadors, including Thomas Campbell and Jude Holt from Laois and Offaly ETB, helped out at NALA's stand

"When it comes to encouraging people to return to education, nobody is better placed than those who faced the same challenges and fears themselves."

at the National Ploughing Championships in September. As always, NALA's stand was very busy and, over the three days, they chatted to hundreds of people about adult literacy.

In October, Joe McDonagh, from Limerick and Clare ETB, spoke at a literacy awareness event in Shannon Library. In November, Michael Power, from Laois and Offaly ETB, gave an inspirational talk to prisoners in Cloverhill Prison. Also in November, Tony Moloney, from Cork ETB, was the guest speaker at an event for Pepsico staff that was held in Cork.

As well as speaking at events, many of the Learner Ambassadors were involved in the SOLAS funded adult literacy and numeracy awareness campaign in September. Not only did they take part in media interviews but many also contributed to local radio advertisements that promoted their local ETB adult education centre.



Ambassadors at the Áras

During awareness week, President Michael D Higgins held a very special event for adult learners and tutors.

On Tuesday 12 September, 30 learners, including many of the Learner Ambassadors, joined tutors and NALA staff for a very special reception in Áras an Uachtaráin to celebrate National Adult Literacy Awareness Week.

The excitement was palpable as we gathered in the State Rooms and waited for the arrival of President Michael D Higgins. And when he entered he didn't disappoint! As he made his way around the room he shook hands and welcomed each person individually.

In his speech, President Higgins congratulated all the learners for their tireless work in raising awareness of literacy in Ireland.

"Each of you serves as a great inspiration to the many others whose lives have been shadowed by literacy difficulties, and I thank and commend you for your courage and the determination that has brought you to where you are today. You all have so much of which to be proud," he said.

President Higgins also commended the bravery involved in making the decision to return to education.

"Experiencing difficulties with literacy can at times make life seem a dark and

lonely place. I am particularly delighted to welcome those of you here today who have bravely addressed the challenge of acquiring literacy, emerging into a world of hope and possibility that must once have seemed unattainable."

President Higgins said it is heartening to witness the progress that has been made in the development of adult literacy and in helping individuals improve their basic skills. He also recognised that there is still much to be done and said he believes that the Learner Ambassadors can play a very important role in helping people with literacy difficulties to get the help they need.

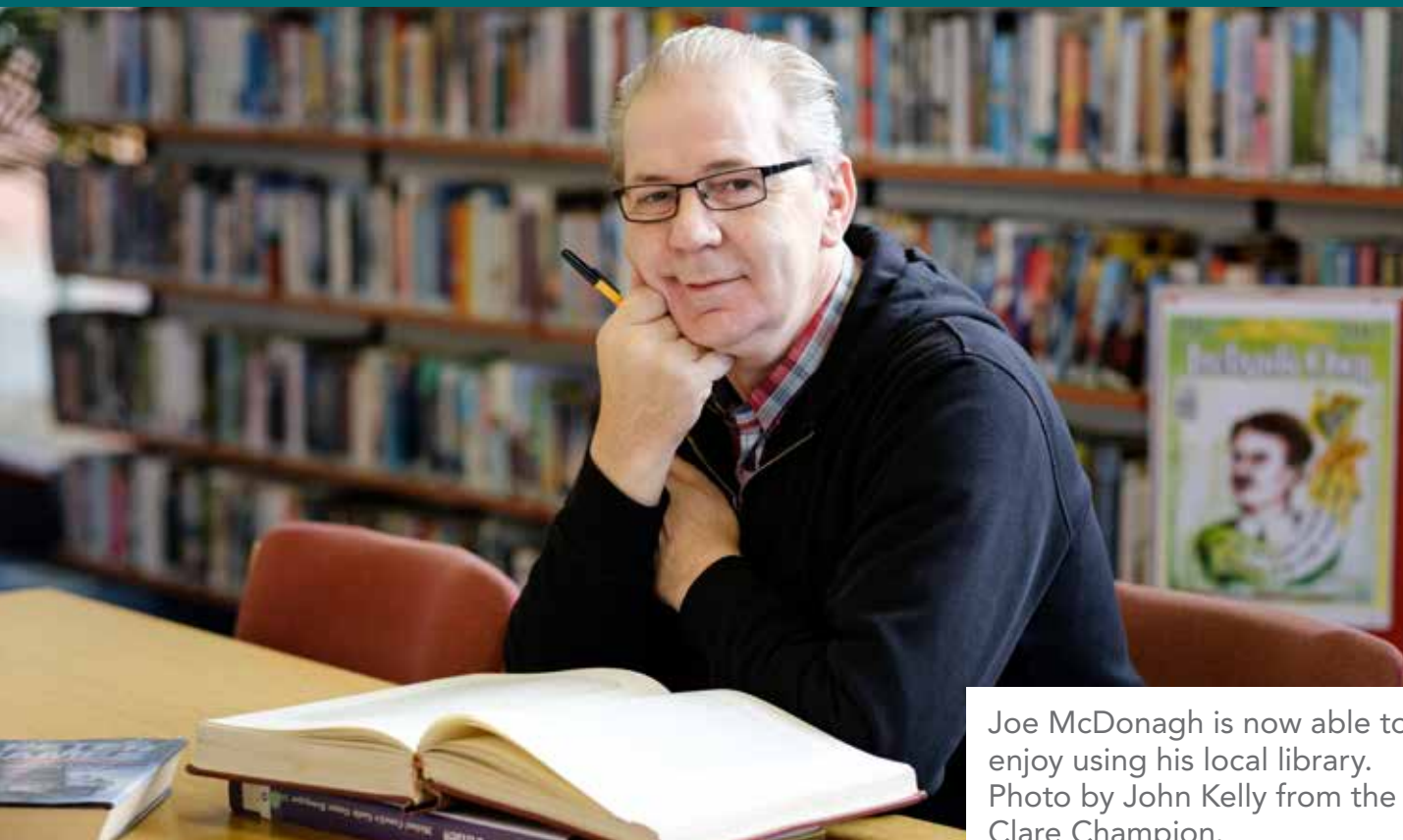
"The recent OECD Survey of Adult Skills, which shows that one in six Irish adults are at or below Level 1 on a 5 level literacy scale, is clearly a sign that more must be done to encourage and assist citizens who have literacy difficulties to access the tremendous resources that are available," said President Higgins.

"I have no doubt that the 'Take the first step' campaign and the Learner Ambassador Programme will be instrumental in raising that OECD figure, bringing closer the day when the goal of literacy for all our citizens will be achieved."



- 1 Emma Tobin Coles and Joann Power, adult literacy organisers at Waterford and Wexford ETB.
- 2 Mary Roche Cleary, adult literacy organiser at Tipperary ETB, and learner Gerard Maher with President Higgins.
- 3 Learners Thomas Campbell and Jude Holt with tutor Alison McEvoy from Laois and Offaly ETB with President Higgins.
- 4 President Higgins welcomes Alison Jones, adult literacy organiser at Galway and Roscommon ETB.
- 5 Tutor Maire Dempsey and learner Ann Nicholas from Limerick and Clare ETB with President Higgins.

“Each of you serves as a great inspiration to the many others whose lives have been shadowed by literacy difficulties.”



Joe McDonagh is now able to enjoy using his local library. Photo by John Kelly from the Clare Champion.

Never too late

A phone call to the adult education centre in Shannon changed Joe McDonagh's life.

Joe McDonagh has achieved many things since returning to education and it's all down to his granddaughter not being able to keep a secret.

"She was always asking me to help her with her homework. She was only about six at the time. But I wasn't able to help her so I'd always make an excuse and say I had to go out to meet somebody. Eventually she said to me: 'You can't read or write can you?' It was like the blood dried up in my body, I didn't know what to say to her."

The next day, when Joe brought his granddaughter to school, she told the

teacher that he couldn't read. The teacher was very kind and discretely gave Joe the phone number for the adult education centre in Shannon, which is run by Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (ETB).

"I put it in my back pocket and went off and thought no more about it. A few days afterwards, my wife found it and asked what it was for. I told her about it and she said: 'Why not give it a go? You're bored sitting here at home!'"

Joe had been spending a lot of time at home. A painter and decorator by trade, he had been out of work since developing

scoliosis and vertigo. Up until then, his trade meant that he had been able to get by without being able to read or write properly. He left school at 13 and a few years later moved to England to work with his uncles on construction sites.

"I'd paint rooms or pass blocks to them. You didn't need to read or write to do that," he reflects. He continued this line of work when he came back to Ireland and got married. Although his job involved a lot of driving, he discovered that he could use landmarks as a way of getting around the fact that he couldn't read road signs very well.

But not being able to work due to his illness had been getting Joe down. He decided to take his wife's advice about calling the number for the education centre that his granddaughter's teacher had given him. That was the first step on a journey that he has loved.

"When I first went into the centre I was sick with nerves. I thought I was just taking up a place that would be better going to someone else. I felt like I was going nowhere fast. But as time went on I gradually got better and after a while I took any course going."

Joe still remembers the time he got his first certificate for completing a course.

"I was so proud. I felt like a movie star getting an Oscar. I felt 10 foot tall. From then on, I knew I wanted to do as many courses as possible and I thought 'just bring it on!'"

That was the start of a journey that would see him complete his Junior Cert and Leaving Cert in English. Now he is passionate about literature and loves buying books.

"My wife says to bring no more books into the house because now the place is full of books," he jokes.

"When I first went into the centre I was sick with nerves. I thought I was just taking up a place that would be better going to someone else. I felt like I was going nowhere fast. But as time went on I gradually got better and after a while I took any course going."

Joe is a member of the Shannon Creative Writers Group and has written lots of stories. He is also about to start writing a play and says that he wouldn't be where he is today without the help of the literacy tutors at the adult education centre in Shannon.

"The tutor Maire Dempsey has been a massive help to me. And so have the rest of the students in the class," he says.

Joe also has some advice for people who struggle with reading and writing but don't know what to do about it.

"I know what it's like to sit at home not knowing what to do or where to get help. But it's never too late to go back to education. There's plenty of courses out there that you can do and they're all free. And the best thing is it's not like going back to school, where you were afraid of the teacher.

"All of the tutors will help you and you won't be frightened to ask them any questions. The same goes for the other people in the class, they will all become your friends."

Planning for the future

Returning to education has opened up a world of possibilities for Michelle Johnston.

It's been a very eventful few years for Michelle Johnston. Just two-and-a-half years ago the Cavan woman suffered a stroke but since then she has recovered and has even returned to adult education in order to create new opportunities for herself.

Michelle, who is a participant on the Deis Nua Community Employment Scheme hosted by the Cavan and Monaghan Drug and Alcohol Service, says that she is a lot more open to trying new things these days.

"The stroke definitely catapulted me into looking at things differently. Afterwards, I joined the community employment scheme and then, a few months later, I started adult education classes. I have been going ever since."

Since taking that first step to return to education at Cavan and Monaghan ETB, Michelle has completed courses at Level 4 in maths and communications. She is currently studying Microsoft Excel and Word, as well as a health-related fitness course.

But it's not just in the classroom that she has been busy. Michelle says that the help and support she received from the staff at Cavan and Monaghan ETB has encouraged her to become an advocate for learning.

"I joined NALA's student subcommittee earlier this year, so I'm now able to play my part in representing the voice of adult learners," she says.

In April, Michelle was selected to represent Cavan and Monaghan ETB as a learner at the National Learner's Forum. This forum gave learners an opportunity to share their views at national level and to help influence policy.

"I joined 100 other learners from across Ireland who met to discuss their achievements and challenges in further education," says Michelle.

Earlier this year, Michelle also joined the Learner Ambassador programme which is run by NALA to help students to promote their local ETB service. A Learner Ambassador is a student who shares their story about the benefits of returning to education with people in their community. Michelle was part of the group of Learner Ambassadors, along with fellow student Stephen McGaughran and tutor Siobhan McEntee, who attended a special reception hosted by President Michael D Higgins in Áras an Uachtaráin.

So far, Michelle has shared her inspirational story about returning to education at several events. She spoke to literacy tutors who were attending a training event in Cavan and she also attended the



Michelle Johnston, far right, with Siobhan McEntee and Michael Duffy at Áras an Uachtaráin.

Virginia Show in August, where she was joined at NALA's stand by fellow Learner Ambassadors Michael Duffy, Stephen McGaughran and Olive Phelan.

As if she wasn't busy enough, a few weeks later Michelle also agreed to be the guest speaker at a graduation ceremony held by Cavan ETB for adult learners. The ceremony, which was attended by hundreds of people, was for students who participated in community education, literacy and skills for work programmes throughout the county.

Michelle's speech to the audience received a huge and well deserved round of applause.

However, Michelle isn't finished yet and she has big plans for the future.

"I am planning to do a course in social care in Cavan Institute and I would really love to go on and get a degree in Psychology. I would like to work in the area of addiction services. I think there is a lot of need for this service because, very often, it is not a topic that is handled very well."



"I joined 100 other learners from across Ireland who met to discuss their achievements and challenges in further education."



The wall hanging the parents created.



Parents working together on the project.

Family learning in Kilkenny

A project celebrating cultural diversity improves literacy and numeracy skills.

Everybody loves hearing about the traditions of people from other countries. Literacy workers in Kilkenny used this natural curiosity as the inspiration for an exciting family learning project.

As part of the project, staff from Wordaid, the local adult education service run by Kilkenny Education and Training Board, worked with the parents of children in St John's junior school. Together they created a wall hanging celebrating the many different countries where the parents are from.

The wall hanging, which is six foot high and six foot wide, features squares representing 16 countries including Croatia, Angola, Czech Republic, Spain, America and, of course, Ireland.

Each square features a country's map and flag as well as a selection of items or symbols that the country is well known for. So, for example, there is a flamenco dancer to represent Spain, while a drawing of the Taj Mahal takes pride of place on India's section.

The items on the wall hanging range from drawings and magazine cutouts to pieces of clothing and toy vehicles such as tractors and cars. Helen Walsh, a resource worker at Wordaid, believes that the collaboration involved in selecting and creating these items helped parents to develop their own self-esteem as they were each able to share their own unique skills.

Teamwork

“Teamwork was very important to the success of the programme because everybody brought a different skill or talent to the table,” says Helen. “There was a huge variety of work involved, including sewing, painting, storytelling, using computers and laminating. By working together as a group, the parents learned a whole new set of skills from each other.”

The range of tasks involved in the project also provided many fun and engaging ways for parents to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. “We showed them how to use computers to carry out research and they enjoyed reading about the customs in other countries,” says Helen.

The parents were able to share their newly improved skills with their children when they worked together at home gathering materials to make items for the wall hanging.

“Teamwork was very important to the success of the programme because everybody brought a different skill or talent to the table.”

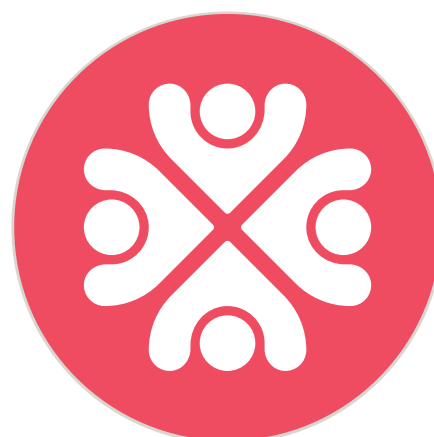
“This particular aspect of the project was very important as it developed parents’ confidence for helping their kids with other types of homework as well,” says Helen.

The project in St John’s is part of a wider interagency programme between the home school community liaison scheme, the Adult Education Guidance Service and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The programme, which runs every Wednesday and Thursday during school term, aims to develop projects that encourage parents and carers to be more actively involved in their children’s education and the wider school community.

One of the additional benefits of the initiative in St John’s is the pathway it creates for learners to access the wider adult literacy service.

“Some parents might be reluctant to consider any further education or training options and some might just not be aware of the services that exist,” says Helen.

“By working with them in their children’s school, parents are able to get a taste of adult education and get to know the tutors without there being any pressure. This leads to them visiting our centre to further explore the different adult literacy options that are available.”



Take the fear out of technology

Tutors in Bray use free online tools to improve the skills learners need for everyday living.

What do ATMs, supermarket self-service tills and train ticket machines have in common? They all use touchscreen technology which can be an obstacle for people who have literacy and numeracy difficulties.

“It’s getting harder to avoid using touchscreens in everyday life and I think they fill everyone with a little bit of panic, particularly if you are in an unfamiliar country or if there is a queue of impatient people behind you. This is doubly so if you aren’t confident about your reading skills,” says Kathie Orr, tutor and project worker at Bray Adult Learning Centre (BALC).

Kathie’s clever solution

Developing the necessary reading skills that Kathie refers to can take lots of repetition and practice. However, it can be very difficult to get practice at using touchscreens, such as train ticket machines or ATMs.

But where there’s a will there’s a way, so Kathie decided to build her own touchscreen simulators. She did this using Scratch, a free online computer programming resource that makes it possible to create interactive stories, games, and animations. The first one she created was in response to a request from students.

“One particular group of students wanted to be able to use the train ticket machine in their local DART station and so that led to the first Scratch touchscreen simulator,” she says.

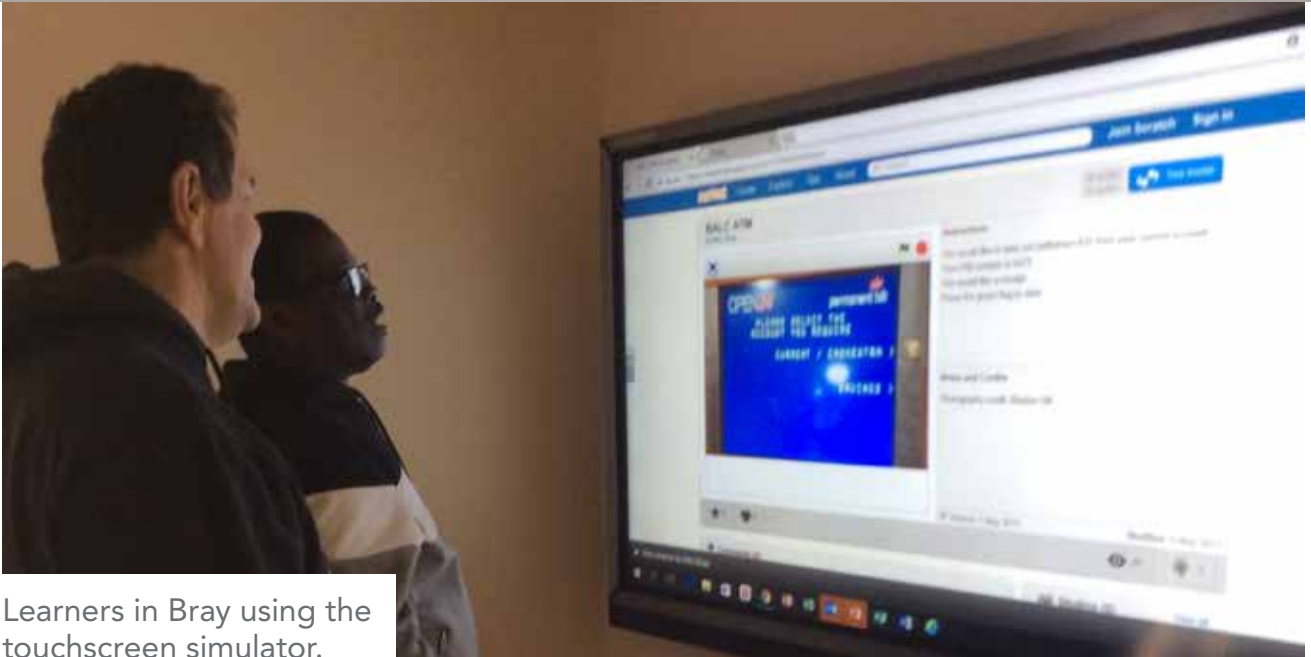
“It was very well received. In fact it was incorporated into a QQI Level 2 Using Technology assessment, which led to the whole group successfully using the DART ticket machine when going on a group outing.”

Virtual ATM

The success of this project led to the decision to create a virtual ATM.

“Another group of students expressed an interest in being able to use bank cards in ATMs and chip and pin machines. Until then they weren’t using them because they were anxious about being able to read the screens,” says Kathie.

Kathie and the group identified the words they would be likely to encounter on an ATM screen. They then used online study apps, such as Quizlet, to develop interactive reading and skills activities that would allow them to practice using this banking vocabulary online.



Learners in Bray using the touchscreen simulator.

Using online study apps is part of BALC's increased focus on the role of technology in adult literacy tuition.

"In our centre we are always trying to combine traditional pen and paper reading skills and word exercises with any technology related options that are available," says Kathie. This approach has developed as a result of the centre's involvement with an Erasmus Strategic Partnership on technology-enhanced learning.

The right stuff

While there are already many ATM simulators available online, they weren't similar enough to the kind of ATM you are likely to encounter in Ireland. So, in order to create one that closely resembled an Irish ATM, Kathie paid a visit to her local bank branch.

She explained the project and got permission to take photos of each screen of the ATM while making a withdrawal. She then used these photos to create the ATM simulator, using Scratch's coding language.

Scratch is a website that can be accessed on devices like iPads and smartphones. This meant that the students could practice using

the ATM screens whenever they wanted. Scratch is particularly effective on an interactive touchscreen board as it provides a very realistic experience for a student.

Confidence boost

"Learners enjoyed using the simulators on the touchscreen board in the centre and reported that they now feel more confident using an ATM. They also feel more confident reading and navigating other touchscreen technology," says Kathie.

Kathie says that using technology to support the learning goals of their literacy students has added another layer to the centre's learning.

"Both tutors and students are acquiring new technology skills and gaining confidence to learn through trial and error. Using technology has encouraged students to work collaboratively in class to solve problems and also to work independently at home on their own devices," she says.

BALC is part of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board. If you would like to see the ATM simulator that Kathie developed just go to www.scratch.mit.edu and type BALCBray into the search bar.

Here's your technology Top 10

At our recent conference to celebrate International Literacy Day, we asked tutors to tell us the websites and apps they find most useful for teaching. Here are their top 10 choices.

1 BBC Skillswise

www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise

BBC Skillswise is a website for adult numeracy and literacy tutors and students. It has free worksheets and factsheets that you can print at home. It also has online games, videos and quizzes that can be used in a class or by students at home.

2 YouTube

www.youtube.com

YouTube is a free video sharing website that makes it easy to watch online videos. You can even create and upload your own videos to share with others. If you want to find out how to do something, chances are there will be a video to show you how on YouTube.

3 Edmodo

www.edmodo.com

Edmodo is a free online network that enables teachers to easily share content, such as quizzes or assignments, and communicate with students, colleagues, and parents.

4 Khan Academy

www.khanacademy.org

Khan Academy is a free personalised learning resource for all ages. It offers practice exercises, instructional videos, and a personalised learning dashboard so students can study at their own pace in and outside of the classroom.

5 Google Classroom

www.classroom.google.com

Google Classroom is a free service for anyone with a personal Google account. The service makes it easy for learners and tutors to connect with each other.

6 Kahoot!

www.kahoot.com

Kahoot! is a free game-based learning platform that tutors can use in classrooms. It lets tutors and students create, play and share learning games.

7 Quizlet

www.quizlet.com

Quizlet is the world's largest student and teacher online learning community. Quizlet offers tools for students to make flashcards, practice spelling, play learning games, test their knowledge and collaborate with other students.

8 Google Maps

www.google.com/maps

Google Maps offers aerial and satellite views of many places. It also offers street views of many cities and towns.

9 Book Creator

www.bookcreator.com

Book Creator enables you to make your own ebooks using an iPad. It's great for making all kinds of children's picture books, comic books, photo books, journals and textbooks.

10 PicCollage

www.piccollage.com

PicCollage is a free online app where you can edit photos and make collages with them. A collage is when you use lots of different images to create one artwork.

Tell us what you think

Do you have any thoughts on technology and learning? Fill in our short survey at www.bit.ly/NALAtTechnology or email NALA's technology enhanced learning officer Caitriona Whelan at cwhelan@nala.ie

Helping students move from Level 2 to Level 3 learning

As part of our ongoing work to improve writeon.ie, NALA's interactive learning website, our distance learning tutors recently provided feedback on the service. This showed that there was a large gap between Levels 2 and 3 under the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) system.

The feedback also showed that learners were having difficulty progressing in subjects such as maths and areas of particular concern were algebra, classification of numbers, fractions, area and volume. These concerns were echoed at writeon.ie training sessions that were attended by 84 tutors from 40 education centres around Ireland.

As a result of this feedback, NALA created a new module on writeon.ie called 'Preparing for Level 3'. This new module has content to support learners who are starting at Level 3, or moving from Level 2 to 3.

The 'Preparing for Level 3' module is unaccredited, meaning that learners are free to move up and down the lesson path and start on any area that suits them. There are no assessments so the learner is free to browse through the videos and exercises that will support new learning.

Learners can also replay videos or go back over exercises to reinforce learning. The content includes instructional videos and practice exercises on several topics including algebra, ratio and scale drawings.

"The new maths content was designed to address a gap that learners often felt was there when going from Level 2 numeracy to do maths at Level 3 under the QQI system. We wanted to provide additional learning



Explore the new communications content on writeon.ie

opportunities for people who felt they wanted to reinforce the learning they had already done," says Inez Bailey, CEO, NALA. Sinead Clinton, a distance learning tutor, says that the new module is a big help to tutors.

"They could use it to introduce a topic, for example algebra, or revise a topic with a class. They could also get learners to use it for 10 minutes at the end of a class to reinforce the learning that has taken place in the class or they can encourage learners to use it between classes," she says.

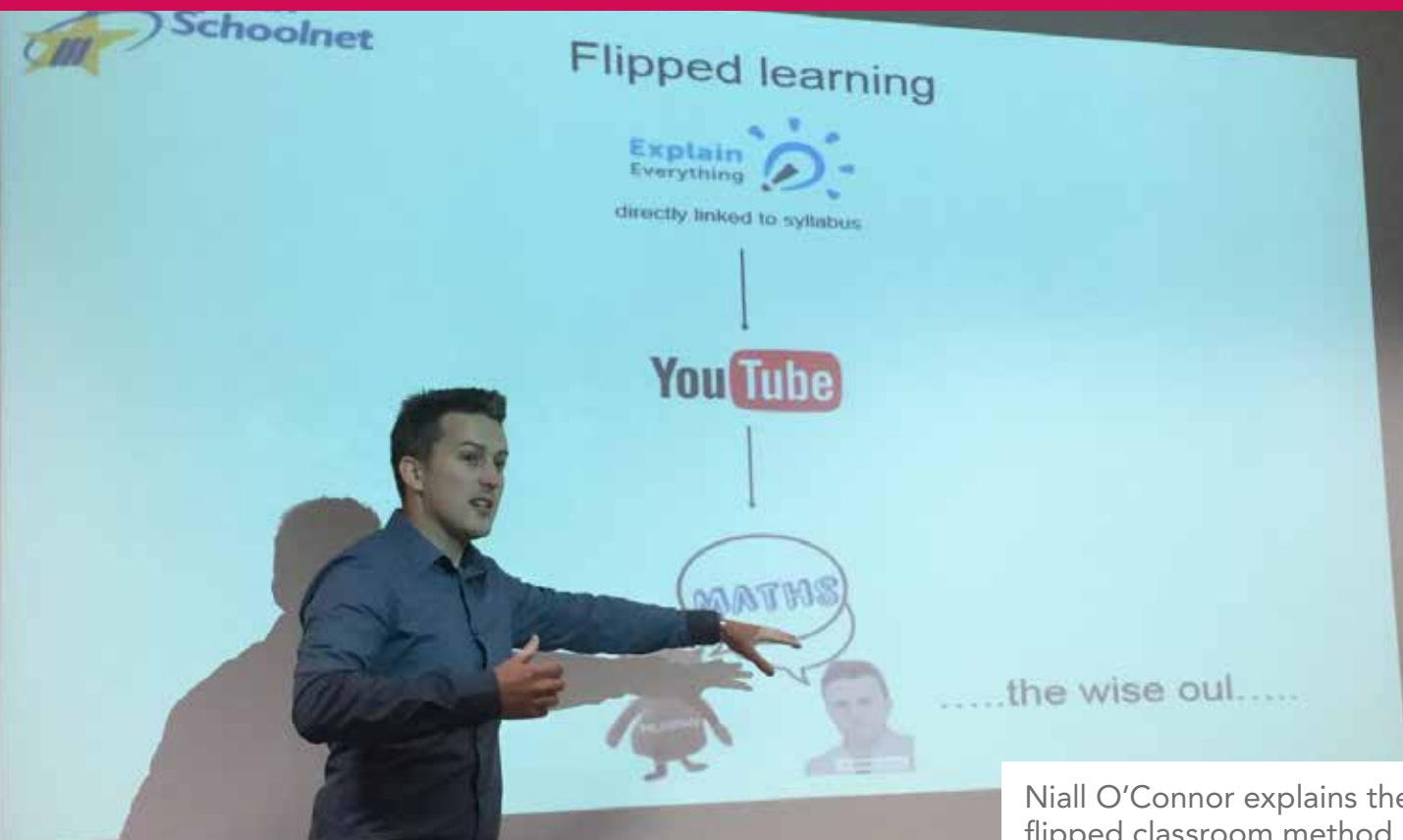
During the summer, following further feedback and input from NALA members, additional content was added to Preparing for Level 3. This content is focused on the QQI learning objectives for communications and it gives learners the opportunity to proof read their own work, and to read and write longer pieces than those found at Level 2. They can also deal with more complex written pieces and consider aspects of writing such as bias and genre.

"The new communications content will be of interest to learners because it will widen their learning opportunities," says Inez.

As with the maths content, the communications content is unaccredited and free for anyone to access and use as they need.

Tell us what you think

Do you have any feedback on our new writeon.ie content? Fill in our short survey at www.bit.ly/NALA-writeon



Niall O'Connor explains the flipped classroom method.

Flipping things around

By using the flipped classroom approach, Niall O'Connor has been able to transform how his students learn maths.

"I believe we are all individuals. I believe all students can succeed. I believe in learner autonomy as a lifelong skill," says Niall O'Connor, a science and maths teacher in Ardgillan College in Dublin. Learner autonomy refers to a student's ability to set appropriate learning goals and take charge of his or her own learning. However, before learners are able to have this more proactive role, teachers must ensure that they create an environment that supports the development of learner autonomy.

For Niall, the flipped classroom is one of the ways teachers create this kind of supportive learning environment. This

approach flips how things are normally done because the teaching takes place online at home in the evenings and homework is then done in class.

For example, Niall uploads videos to his YouTube channel that explain a particular part of the maths syllabus they are studying. For their homework the students watch these videos and write down any questions they might have. Then the next day in class is spent answering those questions thereby doing the work that would have been traditionally thought of as homework.

"Research shows us that lecturing and traditional forms of teaching do not meet

the needs of the individual learner and only certain students succeed with these approaches. I want all learners to be given the same opportunity to learn and succeed and believe personalising students' learning journey will enable this," says Niall. "The big difference between the flipped classroom and traditional lessons is that I do not spend most of my time standing at the front of the room hoping that students are listening. In a 40 minute lesson every minute counts so students are expected to maximise this time completing maths activities," says Niall.

Niall uses a tracking system to see how students are getting on in class. "I use a spreadsheet, which can only be seen by me, to track how students are progressing with the maths activities. The students change colour on the spreadsheet based on the activities they have done. I then know which students to go to first and I can spend that one-on-one time with them."

This system means that Niall is more like a personal tutor than an instructor for the whole class.

"I target students to support in lessons and award gold, silver and bronze awards of achievements. This approach also means that students are not impacted by the working speed of their classmates so it benefits everyone."

Niall has embraced the flipped classroom and believes that, as well as benefitting students, it can also help teachers and parents.

"One of the best things about the flipped classroom is that you build relationships. I can spend more one-to-one time with students. Previously, if I spent 20 minutes at the board instructing, I would only have 20 minutes left in the lesson to help students. Now I have 40 minutes helping students and all students can get their individual questions answered. Also, when the students watch the videos at home, it

"If you are using technology, you need to innovate with new teaching approaches and be a role model for students."

gives parents the opportunity to see what content is being covered in a lesson and usually they would never get to see this," says Niall.

Niall's students have certainly reaped the benefits of his flipped classroom approach to teaching.

"I have had students who wanted to do ordinary level maths but after using the flipped classroom for a number of months they then moved back up to higher level," says Niall.

While creating YouTube videos and digitised class plans may sound time-consuming, Niall says he has no more on his plate than any other teacher. He uses his lesson preparation time differently, that's all. While some teachers may write out their lessons, Niall spends 40 minutes recording a video and uploading it to YouTube. This allows him to personalise the time in the classroom to suit the needs of the students. Crucially for Niall, it also means that students can watch the videos back at their own pace if they need extra time to understand something.

This integration of technology into his maths and science teaching has shown Niall that it's not only students who are learning. "If you are using technology, you need to innovate with new teaching approaches and be a role model for students. It helps if you remember that you are a learner too and we all never stop learning."

From Syria to Roscommon

English classes are helping Syrian refugees adjust to their new life in Ireland.

The war in Syria has created the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. Since the conflict began in 2011, more than five million people have fled to neighbouring countries where they have to wait until they get relocated.

Ireland has been accepting Syrian refugees through the European Union's relocation programme since 2015. In March of this year, Ballaghaderreen, a small town in County Roscommon, saw the arrival of 240 refugees.

To prepare the refugees for life in Ireland, classes in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) are being provided by Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (ETB). Fergal McDonnell, co-ordinator of the ESOL classes, says that the main goal of the classes is to equip them with enough English to be able to engage with the local community and outside world.

"We currently have 80 adults taking part in the ESOL classes, which they can do every day for four hours. The five levels available to them are absolute beginners, beginners, elementary, intermediate and upper intermediate," says Fergal.

While there are always difficulties when teaching English to adults from different

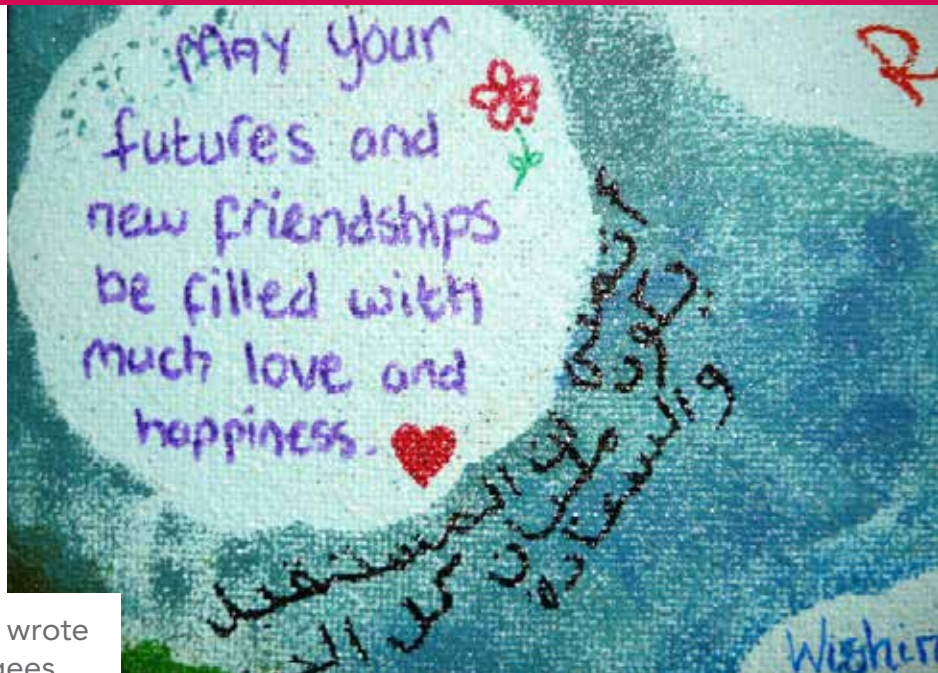
countries, there are some unique challenges involved in teaching classes of Syrian refugees.

"They have to get used to using the Roman alphabet rather than the Arabic alphabet. This can understandably be difficult, especially for those people who already have literacy difficulties in their own language," says Fergal.

Some of the refugees might have studied English before in Syria but that doesn't necessarily give them an advantage. "Sometimes, their grammar and writing ability can be a long way behind their speaking ability. We show them the importance of being able to write in English so that they will be able to go on and get any relevant qualifications they might need for working," says Fergal.

The people who have fled Syria were all trying to escape from the horrors of war, and the tutors are keenly aware that the impact of this needs to be taken into account.

"We have to be very sensitive to learners' backgrounds and the experience they have had over the last number of years. People had to leave their whole lives behind them and, as a result, there can be psychological issues that can affect a person's ability to learn a new language," says Fergal.



Messages Ballaghaderreen locals wrote on a 'Welcome Wall' for the refugees.

Tutors also understand that tensions could arise because people in their class are from many different cultural and political backgrounds in Syria. As well as this, tutors might have a class where there are people who were well educated in Syria alongside people who did not receive a high level of education.

"However, by having the different levels that people can study at, we are able to keep these kind of situations to a minimum," says Fergal.

Fergal also says that the interactive learning approach used by ESOL tutors can be difficult for learners to adjust to, especially if their only learning experience in Syria was mostly of the traditional chalk and talk variety.

"Some people found it strange at the start but they enjoy it now. The tutors always try to create a fun, comfortable learning environment and take time to encourage them at every step of their learning." So, what are some of the most effective methods tutors use to teach English to their learners in Ballaghaderreen?

"Teaching practices such as roleplay are very important. Some of the refugees have health problems as a result of the war so ensuring they have a good degree of health literacy is vital. We roleplay going to the

doctor and go through the questions they should ask that will help them understand the information a doctor gives them."

The tutors also teach them about the history and geography of Ireland and they really enjoy that.

"They learn about the different services, such as citizens' information services and ETB classes, available in other counties. They find this useful because, under the relocation programme, they will eventually leave Ballaghaderreen and move to another part of Ireland," Fergal explains.

He says that it's been great seeing the improvements the learners have made since starting the classes. "Several people have said that they can now understand what the locals are saying to them, which makes them feel more like a part of the community," he says.

"Leaving Syria hasn't been easy for them. Some of them have even had to leave family members behind. It takes a lot of courage and determination to integrate into somewhere else, learn a different language and adapt to a new way of life."

NALA commends all the tutors and the local community for helping the Syrian refugees as they start their new life in Ireland.

Take care of yourself



Mental health and wellbeing are important for tutors and learners.

The decision to include wellbeing in the primary school curriculum and the new Junior Cert cycle shows just how much society's attitude to mental health has changed in recent years.

Positive mental health is now seen as essential for building a more empathic and resilient society.

Caroline Martin, chief psychologist at City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb), believes that the adult education sector can contribute to this new kind of society.

"Often adult learners are parents and carers themselves, so any experience that helps enhance their resilience and wellbeing is a benefit to their wider community," says Caroline.

Take the time

The relationship between a tutor and a learner is critical in supporting and developing that learner's wellbeing. "It's important for a tutor to be able to take the time to talk about a learner's goals with them and then map out how they can achieve these. If they create a working alliance with this common understanding and commitment, it will have a significant impact on the learner's wellbeing," says Caroline.

"It is inevitable that the plan will be adapted as hurdles emerge, but a strong working alliance will help them to change course, if necessary, without a sense of failure."

Caroline is also keen to emphasise the importance of tutors paying enough attention to their own mental health and wellbeing needs.

"It can sometimes be assumed that the learner might be the only one who needs to tend to their mental health. But how can we expect learners to develop the skills to pay attention to, and address, any of their own mental health needs if tutors don't do the same?," she asks.

Help each other

Tutors can help each other's mental health and wellbeing through sharing ideas and work practices among themselves.

"Education can be a very isolated domain. Unless we take deliberate steps to ensure we are challenged in our work by our colleagues, we run the risk of not tending to our own professional development and burning out," says Caroline.

"In CDETb we guard against this by holding monthly meetings for adult education staff where we share ideas about

good practice in education. This process ensures all learners benefit, academically and emotionally, from tutors who are engaged, enthused and well."

Bigger picture

"If tutors pay attention to their own mental health, and take steps to nourish and protect it, they are in a good position to support learners. This perspective allows us to look at the bigger picture, the environment in which learning takes place and how this environment is facilitating or sabotaging positive mental health."

Caroline also believes that tutors don't need to incorporate any new mental health-themed programmes into their teaching to show how wellbeing is important.

"I can appreciate how it might seem simpler to deliver a specific programme that has been designed to enhance resilience or positive mental health. It is perhaps more difficult to look at the existing course materials and explore where there are untapped opportunities. I have no doubt though that there are numerous opportunities in the materials which, when the tutor puts their mental health promoter hat on, are golden."

Do it together

For example, group work, which tutors are already using in their teaching, can be a very useful way of developing a learner's wellbeing.

"The process of engaging in group learning has several health promoting factors. Within groups, learners have the opportunity to learn from one another, to contribute to each other's learning, and to challenge each other. The tutor is critical in ensuring that the group space is safe enough for learners to benefit from the process."



For any tutors who would like to explore additional programmes that focus on mental health and wellbeing, Caroline recommends one called Adult Resilience. Many people are familiar with this programme as it is being rolled out in primary and some post-primary schools as part of the Action Plan for Education from the Department of Education and Skills.

"It is the only programme recognised by the World Health Organisation for addressing anxiety and depression and it is only available to those who have completed the training as facilitators."

If you would like to find out more about the Adult Resilience programme training please email Caroline at winstead@cdetb.ie

"Often adult learners are parents and carers themselves, so any experience that helps enhance their resilience and wellbeing is a benefit to their wider community."



Karen Peakin, literacy co-ordinator at Dublin Simon Community.

Simon shows the way

How literacy training helped people who work with homelessness organisations.

It is not unusual for people experiencing homelessness to face literacy and numeracy difficulties. Dublin Simon Community, who work to prevent and address homelessness in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow, recognise this. Karen Peakin is literacy and personal development co-ordinator in Dublin Simon.

"Literacy issues are more common among people experiencing homelessness than in the general population. This is why we were interested in developing our own literacy service and upskilling staff," Karen says.

In January 2017, staff from Dublin Simon took part in an

initial adult literacy tutor training course, along with staff from Focus Ireland and Merchants Quay Ireland. NALA delivered the course in co-operation with City of Dublin ETB and Dublin Adult Learning Centre. It was accredited by Waterford Institute of Technology.

"The training gave me a broad understanding of literacy issues in the Irish context and introduced some of the main concepts for supporting adults with literacy difficulties," Karen says. "It was also useful to meet other practitioners and discuss the topics and our experiences."

The training also gave Karen some useful ideas she has used in her teaching.

Using a mix of games, writing exercises, puzzles and whiteboards all helped her to engage with people who were not initially keen to focus on developing their skills.

Karen says that the literacy training has led to positive experiences for people using Dublin Simon's services. "Many of our learners have made huge progress throughout the year and have developed their reading fluency, spelling ability and, most importantly, their confidence," she says.

"One client's biggest achievement this year was reading a book we had produced in class. He wrote about his life growing up and he then read this for the staff in the accommodation where he lived. That was a very proud moment for him."

Dublin Simon has also introduced learners to NALA's interactive learning website, writeon.ie, with positive results. "Four learners have accessed this service, with two of these already completing some modules. It is a great introduction to e-learning, an area we hope to build on in the next year," says Karen.

Dublin Simon's literacy service also do all they can to help people continue with further education and training. "We work

with NALA and with ETB adult education providers to provide information for learners who wish to access further education in the community," says Karen. "We aim to be a first step for learners who might not have the confidence to go back to education on their own. As the saying goes, nine-tenths of education is encouragement."

Since the training, Dublin Simon's literacy staff have also co-operated with other Dublin Simon services on literacy matters. For example, they have edited documents such as consent forms and information leaflets to make them clearer and easier to use. They also collaborated with NALA to provide staff training in health literacy.

NALA's work with services for people experiencing homelessness is part of our support for implementing the National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.

To find out more about the NALA-WIT initial tutor training course, Developing Literacies 1, please contact Eilis Roche in Waterford Institute of Technology eroche@wit.ie or Bláthnaid Ní Chinnéide in NALA bnichinneide@nala.ie

Help us find out what works

It's natural in every workplace that some practices are more successful than others and this is especially true in adult education. Teaching adults who have returned to education is a complex and demanding process as they often carry with them the negative effects of previous learning experiences. As a result, tutors often feel they are required to go beyond a traditional teaching role. As well as a teacher, they can be required to be a facilitator, a mediator, a motivator, a supporter, a guide, advocate and much more besides.

Benefits of reflective practice

One of the ways tutors find out about new approaches to teaching is through reflective practice. This refers to tutors' process of taking the time to reflect on their approach to teaching and question their teaching methods. Adult literacy and numeracy tutors have been engaging in reflective practice for a very long time, either as part of their initial tutor or volunteer training and in their ongoing continuous professional development.

Two NALA publications which tutors will find useful in supporting reflective practice are Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work and Curriculum Development: An evolving model for adult literacy and numeracy education.

Both of these research publications are available to download free on NALA's website www.nala.ie

Take part in upcoming research

At NALA, we have some very exciting research projects coming up in 2018. These projects will explore why literacy matters to Irish society and we would love to hear from any tutors or students who would like to take part. To find out more please contact Tina Byrne, NALA research officer at tbyrne@nala.ie

Setting the agenda

Why has adult learning dropped off the agenda in the UK?

That was the question addressed at a recent conference in London called Adult learning: setting the agenda.

NALA's CEO Inez Bailey attended the conference and she is convinced Ireland can learn valuable lessons from Britain's efforts to put the issue back in the spotlight.

"The Learning and Work Institute, with support from a host of partners in the UK, is trying to get adult learning back on the agenda in their country," says Inez.

"Their main argument is based on research, carried out by UNESCO's Institute of Lifelong Learning, which shows that adult learning benefits our health, our employability and the likelihood that we will make progress at work. It also makes it more likely that we will engage with society," says Inez.

It is increasingly clear, says Inez, that adult learning is a cost-effective way to address the challenges we face in a world with ageing populations, forced migration, unstable employment, and fast-moving technological change.

As a society, we need better systems to help us understand the world we live in and be more resilient to, but accepting of, change.

"A report presented at the conference by the Learning and Work Institute concludes that the UK needs a lifelong learning strategy that involves education, health, justice, employment and other services," says Inez.

However, there is still some way to go before this lifelong learning strategy can be put in place and its aims achieved.

"While it is hard to find those against the concept of adult learning or lifelong learning in the UK, it is also difficult to get consensus about who should fund it and who should have responsibility for it," says Inez.

Systemic change

The thorny issue of how to bring about the systemic change needed to create and realise a new strategy for lifelong learning was also discussed.

"There was agreement that the role of adult learning in the three policy areas of work, health and community must be clearly articulated and developed. The point was also raised that, for adult learning to be properly valued, it needs to have the necessary resources at a national, organisational and individual level. This is something that also applies to the adult learning sector in Ireland," says Inez.

Lessons for Ireland

Much of the debate on adult learning focused on how increased pressure from globalisation has left many countries struggling to achieve the goals set out in their lifelong learning strategies. In the UK, this has left policymakers preoccupied with apprenticeships, skills and qualifications — to the detriment of a wider learning agenda.

To make matters worse, many organisations involved in lifelong learning in the UK have failed to show what a positive impact their activities have. A shortage of public money and silo working, when people within an organisation do not share information with others in the same organisation, and increased competition are also putting the lifelong learning agenda at risk.

"This may resonate with people working in the further education and training sector in Ireland as it goes through its own systemic change and, for me, it sharpens the focus about priorities for the future," says Inez.

"It is clear we all need to get better at capturing evidence of the impact our work has. We need to use that information to get the message across to policy makers, as well as the general public, that this work is important and deserves public funding."



Daren Okafo



Albert Smith

In the media



Adult literacy and further education featured prominently in the media over the last few months:

- In July, Inez Bailey, CEO, NALA was interviewed on the Pat Kenny radio show about how parents can help their kids avoid the 'Summer Slide'.
- Pharmacies that received NALA's Crystal Clear mark were mentioned in several local papers in August, including the Westmeath Examiner and the Clare Champion.
- The 'Take the first step' awareness campaign received great media coverage in September. The campaign was featured in the Irish Examiner, The Irish Sun and the Daily Mail as well as several great interviews with students and tutors on RTE's Drivetime show and many local radio stations.
- Photos of Learner Ambassadors during their visit to Áras an Uachtaráin in September appeared in 17 local newspapers.
- In October, Waterford adult learner Maurice Sammon appeared on RTE's Today Show alongside author and literacy ambassador Sheila O'Flanagan.

New staff members

We are delighted to welcome two new people to the NALA team.

Daren Okafo is our new innovations and research manager. Daren has been involved in adult and non-formal education and educational research for the past 25 years. Most recently, he worked as the technology and innovations co-ordinator at St Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia, Canada. While there, as a member at the Coady International Institute, he worked on developing a critical approach to using new media technologies in community-centric adult learning programmes, both in Canada and the Global South.

Albert Smith has joined our plain English service. Albert spent 35 years as a journalist, most of it in daily newspapers. He worked as a reporter and feature writer, a sub editor, a chief sub editor and a foreign editor. He spent 23 years working on the Irish Independent and was also the chief sub editor on the Sunday Tribune. He also spent two years working as resident journalist at Trocaire, the development agency. Albert worked in the US and the UK before moving to Ireland in 1982. He ran his own editing company from 2007 until earlier this year, when he joined the NALA plain English service.



Dates for the Diary

National Forum for Adult Literacy Tutors 2018

Saturday 27 January 2018

Venue: The Ashling Hotel,
Parkgate Street, Dublin 8

ESOL conference 2018

Thursday 22 March 2018

Venue: The Ashling Hotel,
Parkgate Street, Dublin 8

Numeracy conference 2018

Tuesday 29 May 2018

Venue: Trinity College Dublin

Email **Fergus Dolan** fdolan@nala.ie for more details about these conferences.

NALA Student Days

Saturday 17 February 2018

Venue: Radisson Hotel,
Lough Atalia Road, Galway

Saturday 3 March 2018

Venue: The Ashling Hotel,
Parkgate Street, Dublin 8

Email **Margaret Murray** mmurray@nala.ie for more details about the Student Days.

Plain English Training

Plain English is a style of writing and layout that the intended reader can understand after a single reading. It will help you clarify what you're trying to say and, as a result, help your reader get your message exactly as you intended.

In 2018 we will hold plain English training on:

Wednesday 21 February

Wednesday 25 April (writing for the web)

Wednesday 13 June (in Cork)

Wednesday 17 October (writing for the web)

Wednesday 21 November

NALA Annual General Meeting

Saturday 14 April

Our AGM in 2018 will be held in Portlaoise. Members are invited to come along to hear how their support is helping us improve the lives of people with literacy difficulties. It is also a great opportunity to elect members to our board and hear about our work.

We would love to see you there.

