

# Literacy Matters

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



## Opening the Door to Reading

To mark our 40th anniversary NALA have launched VOICES.



### Also:

- Minister Harris announces plans for a new 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy
- Introducing our new CEO
- Take the First Step campaign launched
- Learning through lockdown

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## On the cover:

Pictured launching VOICES are adult literacy students Mark Daly and Patrick Sutton.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a charity and membership-based organisation. We work to support adults with unmet literacy and numeracy needs to take part fully in society and to have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs. NALA does this by raising awareness of the importance of literacy, doing research and sharing good practice, providing distance learning services and by lobbying for further investment to improve adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

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# Welcome

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to our latest edition of **Literacy Matters**.

We hope you all are keeping safe and well. As Ireland is in the middle of further COVID-19 restrictions we know it can be a tough time for people. For this edition of **Literacy Matters** we wanted to share some more resources for learners and tutors that might be helpful during this time as well as some updates on what we have been up to during the last few months.

Firstly, we would like to introduce our new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Colleen Dube. Colleen joins the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) from Uversity where she was CEO from 2015-2020. Read more about Colleen on page 4.

To mark the 40th anniversary of NALA, in October we launched VOICES, a wonderful new collection of short stories and essays. It is edited by one of Ireland's best-known authors, Patricia Scanlan and published as part of the New Island Open Door series. Read more about VOICES on page 6.

On International Literacy Day (8 September) the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris TD, announced plans to develop a new 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy. The Minister gave SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, the responsibility to develop the strategy and asked them to report back within six months. Find out more on progress of the strategy on page 10.

We have also launched our national Take the First Step campaign, a joint initiative between the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), SOLAS and NALA. Find out more on page 12.

Read Mary Devereux's story on page 14 where she shares discovering the joy of reading and how returning to learning with Waterford and Wexford ETB was one of the best decisions she ever made.

We are still here to provide support with brushing up on reading, writing, numbers and digital literacy. Call us on Freephone **1800 20 20 65** or text **LEARN** to **50050**.

If you have a story for **Literacy Matters** please email Aoife Mulhall at [amulhall@nala.ie](mailto:amulhall@nala.ie)

**Best wishes from all the team at NALA**



# Introducing our new CEO – Colleen Dube

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**For over twenty years, Colleen has continuously contributed to Ireland's educational landscape.**



Colleen's motto is to make the seeming impossible possible. Colleen is committed to realising the potential of individuals and organisations.

Speaking about her appointment Colleen stated, "I am honoured to take up the CEO position of NALA as it celebrates its 40th Anniversary. I am excited about collaborating with NALA's staff, members and stakeholders to build on NALA's impressive achievements, contribute to the government's commitment to a 10 year literacy strategy and empower adults with life-long literacy skills."

Originally from Connecticut in the United States, Colleen holds a Bachelor of Arts from Drew University, a MPhil in Irish Studies from the National University of Ireland Galway and a MBA from the Smurfit School of Business. She also has Certificates in Adaptive Leadership and Professional Irish.

From 2006-2015 she was Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission and from 2001- 2006 a Liaison Officer for the RAPID programme administered by Pobal. Earlier in her career she was Curator with the National Museum of Ireland and European funded Project Manager.

**"I am honoured to take up the CEO position of NALA as it celebrates its 40th Anniversary."**

Colleen Dube joins NALA from Uversity where she was Chief Executive Officer (CEO) from 2015-2020. Uversity is a registered charity that offered a Master of Arts in Creative Process until 2017 and from January 2018 awards Higher Education Scholarships to Adult Learners.



## Thank you from NALA

Everyone at NALA would like to say a huge thank you to our outgoing CEO, Dr Inez Bailey. Inez dedicated much of her work life to literacy issues. She led a team in NALA for almost 25 years, working tirelessly to make sure that people with literacy, numeracy and digital skills needs can fully take part in society. She has been a leading campaigning and lobbying force on adult literacy issues – speaking out when few dared, raising awareness of inequalities in education and society.

During this time Inez was at the forefront of policy making, research and securing a thirty-fold increase in additional funding for adult literacy services in Ireland. She also led great innovations, delivering 14 television series about adult literacy with RTE and the first ever distance learning service for adult literacy, which has gone from strength to strength.

On behalf of everyone at NALA, our board, students and members, we wish Inez the very best in her new role with the Centre for Effective Services.



Helen Ryan, Aoife Mulhall and Margaret Murray from NALA.



# Opening a Door to Reading

**VOICES is a collection of short stories by 27 authors launched for emerging readers.**

To mark the 40th anniversary of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), in October we launched VOICES, a wonderful new collection of short stories and essays. It is edited by one of Ireland's best-known authors, Patricia Scanlan and published as part of the New Island Open Door series. The stories are written in plain English and are designed to encourage adults who do not read often, or find reading difficult, to discover the joy of books.

## The Open Door Series

The Open Door series was founded by Patricia Scanlan and New Island publisher Edwin Higel in the late 1990s.

Before Patricia became a full-time writer she worked in Dublin Public Libraries, where she became very aware of literacy issues, meeting people who could neither read nor write, but who wanted desperately to learn to do both. There were no suitable books for adults at the time, and so she decided to write one. The concept was very simple. The book would be composed of easy, accessible writing, skilful storytelling that kept the reader turning the page and made the whole experience a joyful, positive one, rather than a chore as Helen Ryan NALA Policy Officer explains:

"One of the things we heard often from literacy students and tutors and librarians was there were not any or enough easy to read books for emerging adult readers. Adults need to have access to texts and books that were interesting, relevant and easy to read."



"Patricia Scanlan heard this feedback when she worked as a librarian and wrote a book with this reader in mind," Helen continues. "From this she approached New Island and 'Open Door' was born. Over the last 22 years there have been many Open Door books written by many famous Irish authors. They are used in adult literacy and education classes throughout the country and are available in local libraries and in local bookstores."

"In late 2019 NALA and New Island met to chat about a new edition of Open Door. Patricia had already been talking to New Island about ideas and a book of short stories was suggested. Patricia reached out to authors and 27 agreed to write a short story for this collection. The stories are all very different and stir up many memories and emotions. We were delighted to launch the book in October and we already have follow up plans to develop learning materials for students and tutors."

## Working together

The Department of Rural and Community Development has funded copies of books so they are available to loan in every library in Ireland. The Department of Further and Higher Education and SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, have funded copies of books for adult literacy students in 120 ETB adult literacy centres. An Post, a long-time supporter of NALA and adult literacy initiatives, broadcast virtual readings by some of the authors of VOICES.

Clare McNally, NALA Communications Manager explains the importance of books like VOICES for emerging readers.

"Since we were set up in 1980, we have supported many people return to education to improve their reading and writing skills. This has life changing benefits; not only do people learn the technical skills of reading and writing, but they gain much needed confidence in themselves, and it has a positive ripple effect in their family, community and society.

"We are very grateful to Patricia Scanlan, the authors and both Departments for making this new book of short stories available for emerging readers. We would encourage anyone who hasn't picked up a book in a long time or is nervous about reading a novel and wants to, to contact us for information on free courses nationwide."



**"Dear reader, our collective wish for you, is that VOICES empowers you as you continue on your journey with reading."**

**Patricia Scanlan**

## To the reader

"It is a privilege and honour, as the editor of this inspiring book, to introduce these fine writers to a new audience," says editor Patricia Scanlan.

"There aren't enough words to thank them. They are all very special people who have touched the lives of many. Open Door, and this book, would not exist without them."

Patricia continues, "Finally, and most importantly, dear reader, our collective wish for you, is that VOICES empowers you as you continue on your journey with reading. We hope VOICES enhances your reading experience in every way. May it bring as much joy and delight to you, as it has to all of us who have been involved in creating it."

VOICES features writing from Graham Norton, Roddy Doyle, Blindboy Boatclub, Carlo Gébler, Christine Dwyer Hickey, Ciara Geraghty, Colm O'Regan, Deirdre Purcell, Dermot Bolger, Donal Ryan, Emily Hourican, Louise Kennedy, Martina Devlin, Melatu Uche Okorie, Nuala O'Connor, Patricia Scanlan, Patrick Freyne, Paul Perry, Rachael English, Roisín O'Donnell, Ruth Gilligan, Sheila O'Flanagan, Sinead Crowley, Sinead Moriarty, Úna-Minh Kavanagh, Yan Ge and Marita Conlon-McKenna.

VOICES is available now in bookshops and local libraries across Ireland.

## Did you know?



# 54

Open Door has published 54 books including novellas, a poetry book and 8 Irish language translations.



Open Door texts have specific guidelines – a discernible plot; a few, well-developed characters; simple language and short paragraphs or chapters.

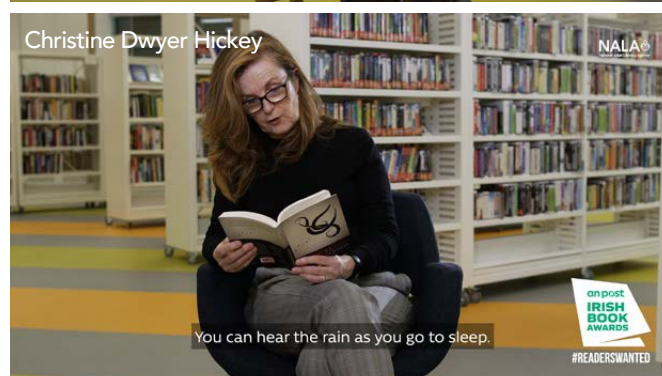


Open Door books are used a lot by students learning English as a second or other language (ESOL).

## VOICES virtual readings

Authors Emily Hourican, Patrick Freyne, Christine Dwyer Hickey and Dermot Bolger read their stories from VOICES at the beautiful Coolock Library. Thank you to An Post for producing these virtual readings for us.

Watch the VOICES readings online at [nala.ie/opening-a-door-to-reading](http://nala.ie/opening-a-door-to-reading)





# Keep on learning



**No matter what, where or when you want to learn, there are lots of options available with NALA.**

## Not sure what to do with the kids?

Looking for things to do with your children during restrictions? Visit **helpmykidlearn.ie** where there are lots of fun and easy activities that parents can do at home with their children to improve their reading, writing and maths skills.

It includes general information, useful tips and hundreds of fun activities that can be done in the home or outside. And best of all, the activities will help children to learn without them even realising it.

Go to **helpmykidlearn.ie** for lots of ideas.

## Resources for tutors

We have 900 worksheets you can download. You can search by subjects, QQI awards and levels or by keywords like spelling or gardening. We also have over 300 short videos with easy-to-follow lessons on spelling, grammar, maths and much more.

Visit **nala.ie/tutors** to access tutor resources.

## The Distance Learner

NALA's Distance Learner worksheet is a monthly resource for adult literacy and numeracy students. Each edition covers topical issues that month as well as lots of exercises and activities.

Download the latest edition of the Distance Learner at **nala.ie/publications**

## Learn online or over the phone

We know that sometimes it can be hard to find the time to do a course. That's the great thing about NALA's Distance Learning Service. If you would like to brush up on reading, writing, numbers or digital literacy, give us a call. We can help with:

- › Reading, writing and spelling
- › Brushing up on maths
- › Using technology
- › Understanding health information

We're here from 9.30 am to 5 pm, Monday - Friday. You can study online by yourself or work with a tutor over the phone. Or, you can do a combination of these to suit your lifestyle. We call when it suits you and you decide what to study. We keep working with you until you meet your goals.

Call us on Freephone **1800 202065** or text **LEARN** to **50050**.

# A strategy for literacy, numeracy and digital literacy

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## Minister Harris announces plans to develop a new 10-year strategy on International Literacy Day.



Clare McNally (NALA), Andrew Brownlee (SOLAS) and Paddy Lavelle (ETBI) join Minister Harris at the strategy launch. Photo courtesy of the Department of Further and Higher Education.

On 8 September, International Literacy Day, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Simon Harris, announced his plans to develop a new 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy strategy. The Minister gave SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, the responsibility to develop the strategy and asked them to report back within six months. The strategy will adopt a whole-of-government approach and provide a framework to support individuals to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Announcing the new strategy, Minister Harris said: "One in six adults in Ireland has problems reading and understanding information, while half of us lack basic digital skills. For many adults, this can be debilitating. It can prevent access to employment, or education.

"Or it can be a barrier to the everyday tasks such as helping children with their homework or reading your prescriptions.

"Many of us believe access to a smartphone or an ability to use social media makes us digitally literate, but we know half of us lack the basic digital skills needed. These challenges face individuals every day, but COVID-19 reinforced many of those obstacles. It is vitally important we acknowledge these challenges and try to improve them.

"I have updated my government colleagues of my plan to develop a new strategy to build on and streamline the substantial work that is already being done in this area, to increase awareness of services for the public and to capture the contribution that can be made right across government to deliver better literacy, numeracy and digital skills in the adult population. I am looking forward to strong engagement across government and with stakeholder bodies, communities and citizens."

Andrew Brownlee, CEO of SOLAS, said: "Literacy and numeracy has long been a cornerstone of Further Education and Training (FET), channelling circa €30m each year to deliver a range of literacy and numeracy supports via ETBs, NALA and community organisations, as well as embedding digital skills development across most Level 1-4 provision."

Andrew Brownlee continued: "SOLAS is delighted to be tasked with leading the development of a longer-term strategy to address literacy and numeracy needs and the digital divide, with a cross-government approach critical to its success."

## NALA's Response

Welcoming the announcement, Clare McNally from NALA said:

"If there's one thing we learnt during the pandemic, it's that many people struggled with understanding and accessing information. Those with literacy needs, without access to technology or digital skills had the greatest difficulty supporting their children's learning, were often the hardest to reach with correct information, and felt isolated. Indeed many callers to our helpline simply wanted help using technology to stay in touch with family.

"NALA has been calling for a new strategy to address these inequalities for some time now, so we are greatly heartened to see the government's commitment to develop and implement a new 10-year strategy. We would encourage anyone interested in this new strategy to submit their views to the public consultation that was just launched. This is a great opportunity to support people with literacy, numeracy and digital skills needs, so that individuals can make constructive choices, self-advocate and ultimately respond to external pressures and change."

**"These challenges face individuals every day, but COVID-19 reinforced many of those obstacles. It is vitally important we acknowledge these challenges and try to improve them."**

**Minister Simon Harris**

## Have your say



In November, Minister Harris launched a public consultation for this strategy. You can give your views on:

What you think are the challenges and opportunities for Ireland in relation to adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

How you think we can create an environment where all adults in Ireland have the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully take part in society.

You can share your ideas with SOLAS by visiting [solas.ie/alnd-strategy](https://solas.ie/alnd-strategy) or call Helen Ryan NALA Policy Officer on **01 412 7919** to find out more. We are also emailing a survey to NALA members for you to have your say.



Dr Inez Bailey and Helen Ryan with NALA's reports.

## Learn more

In August, NALA launched three new reports where you can learn more about how to tackle the inequalities faced by people with literacy difficulties.

**Literacy Now** – A report examining key policy and practices in adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

**Literacy for Life** – Proposes a whole-of-government approach for investing in adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

**Literacy Impact** – An outcomes framework for measuring the impact of improved literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

These reports are all available on our website [nala.ie/publications](https://nala.ie/publications)



# Take the First Step

**Strong literacy, numeracy and digital skills are essential to understand public health messaging, access services online and identify fake news.**

In October, we launched 'Take the First Step', our national public information campaign to encourage those who have difficulties with literacy and numeracy to contact NALA or their local Education and Training Board to get the help they need to improve their skills.

The campaign is a joint initiative between the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), SOLAS (the Further Education and Training Authority) and NALA. The opportunity is free and open to all, with participants able to choose what, where and when they want to learn.

Taking the first steps on any difficult journey requires courage and commitment – and for those who have difficulties with reading, writing, maths or technology, the stigma attached can prove daunting and discouraging.

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.

The campaign includes radio and digital advertising and features people from different parts of the country talking about how returning to education has changed their lives and encourages others to give it a go.

**"For the one in six adults with literacy and numeracy needs in Ireland, it is an especially difficult time. We would encourage anyone who would like help to improve their skills, to contact us."**

**Clare McNally,  
NALA**

"The pandemic emerged very fast and Ireland had to respond quickly", says Clare McNally, NALA Communications Manager. "This ranged from government decisions about new ways of delivering health and public services to the public adapting to new societal and working restrictions. Many people have felt overwhelmed by the volume of information, however for the one in six adults with literacy and numeracy needs in Ireland, it is an especially difficult time. We would encourage anyone who would like help to improve their skills, to contact us for information on free courses."



## How to access support

The 'Take the First Step' campaign encourages adults who have difficulty with reading, writing, maths or technology to contact a Freephone support line **1800 20 20 65** or free text **LEARN** to **50050** to get the help they need.

Once they make contact NALA will put them in contact with their local ETB Adult Education Centre or tell them about other free services that will meet their needs.

NALA is also offering a distance learning service that provides tutoring options for people over the phone or electronically, as well as e-learning programmes such as **learnwithnala.ie**

## Thank you

NALA would like to say a huge thank you to all Education and Training Boards, adult literacy students and ambassadors Sinead Moriarty and Catherine Dunne who took part in the campaign this year. We will be sharing some of these stories in the next edition of Literacy Matters. We would also like to thank ETBI, SOLAS and the Department of Further and Higher Education for their ongoing support.

# Building back confidence

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**"I'm not nervous about filling in forms anymore because I can understand what I'm being asked for."**

**Mary Devereux**

## **Mary Devereux returned to education because she wanted to be able to provide the best possible care for her son.**

Mary Devereux has always loved talking to people. Her natural curiosity and friendly manner meant that she was perfectly suited to her job in Kelly's Hotel in Rosslare. Mary worked in the hotel for 26 years and loved meeting the guests and chatting with them. Mary left school at 13 and had difficulties with reading and writing all her life, but she was able to get by at work without it being an issue.

However, when her son was three, he was diagnosed with autism and Fragile X syndrome, a condition that can affect a child's learning and behaviour. Following her son's diagnosis, Mary gave up her job at Kelly's to become his full-time carer.

There was a lot of paperwork involved in her son's healthcare, and Mary knew she would have to improve her reading, writing and spelling.

"Filling in forms was a big deal for me. It was a challenge trying to understand what the forms were about and what information they were asking me to fill in. That's why I decided to go back to education," Mary says.

It was Mary's sister who told her about the free adult literacy classes in their local adult education centre in Enniscorthy, part of Waterford and Wexford ETB. Mary thought about it and decided to give it a try. It turned out to be one of the best decisions she ever made.

"It has been a fantastic experience. The confidence I got from coming back to learning has had a great impact on my life. I'm not nervous about filling in forms anymore because I can understand what I'm being asked for. I'm also much more confident about asking doctors any questions that I might have about my son's healthcare," she says.

Mary likes that the classes in the centre are nothing like being at school.





"When I started school I was left handed. The teacher brought my mother in and she said 'you have to work to get her to write with her right hand'. It really knocked my confidence and after that I struggled with learning. But the tutors in the centre are very supportive and encouraging. I also really enjoy the social aspect of going to the centre. The other students are friendly and there's a great atmosphere there."

Before she went back to education, Mary didn't read for pleasure at all. Now, she's really gotten into reading novels in her spare time. She likes mystery stories, and one of her favourite things to read is the Catch the Criminal section of Ireland's Own magazine.

She also likes writing about the experiences she has had in her own life.

"One of the things I like most about the classes is that they have enabled me to finally get things from my head onto paper," she says.

Mary encourages anyone who wants to improve their literacy skills to visit their local education centre. She knows how difficult it is to take that first step back to education, but she says that the rewards are worth it.

"My advice for anyone going back to education is to stick with it and your life will improve. It can take time but you'll be glad you did it."

Mary is now an advocate for adult learning. NALA would like to thank Mary for sharing her story so honestly, and helping to encourage others to pick up the phone and call us to get information about different courses to suit their needs.

**Watch a video of Mary telling her story on NALA's YouTube channel**  
[youtube.com/NALAIreland](https://youtube.com/NALAIreland)

**"The classes have enabled me to finally get things from my head onto paper."**

**Mary Devereux**

# The gold standard for writing

You might not be too familiar with the International Standards Organisation, but trust us, this is a big deal.

**A new plain language standard will help readers to find, understand and use information the first time they read it.**

You may have heard that clear and easy-to-read information for the reader takes blood, sweat and tears for the writer. Well, NALA is trying to make life easier for both by taking part in international efforts to develop a plain language standard.

The International Federation of Plain Language (IFPL) and others are working to develop a plain language standard to help writers improve the quality and clarity of their information. In Ireland, NALA and the National Standards Authority of Ireland are advocating for, and supporting, the development of an international plain language standard. The standard should help all readers to find, understand and use information more easily.

## Who is the IFPL?

The International Federation of Plain Language (IFPL) is an organisation advocating for the development of plain language. Its members include international plain language experts from organisations like the Plain Language Association International, Clarity International (plain legal language) and the US Centre for Plain Language. The IFPL has a dedicated working group that is focusing on developing the plain language standard.

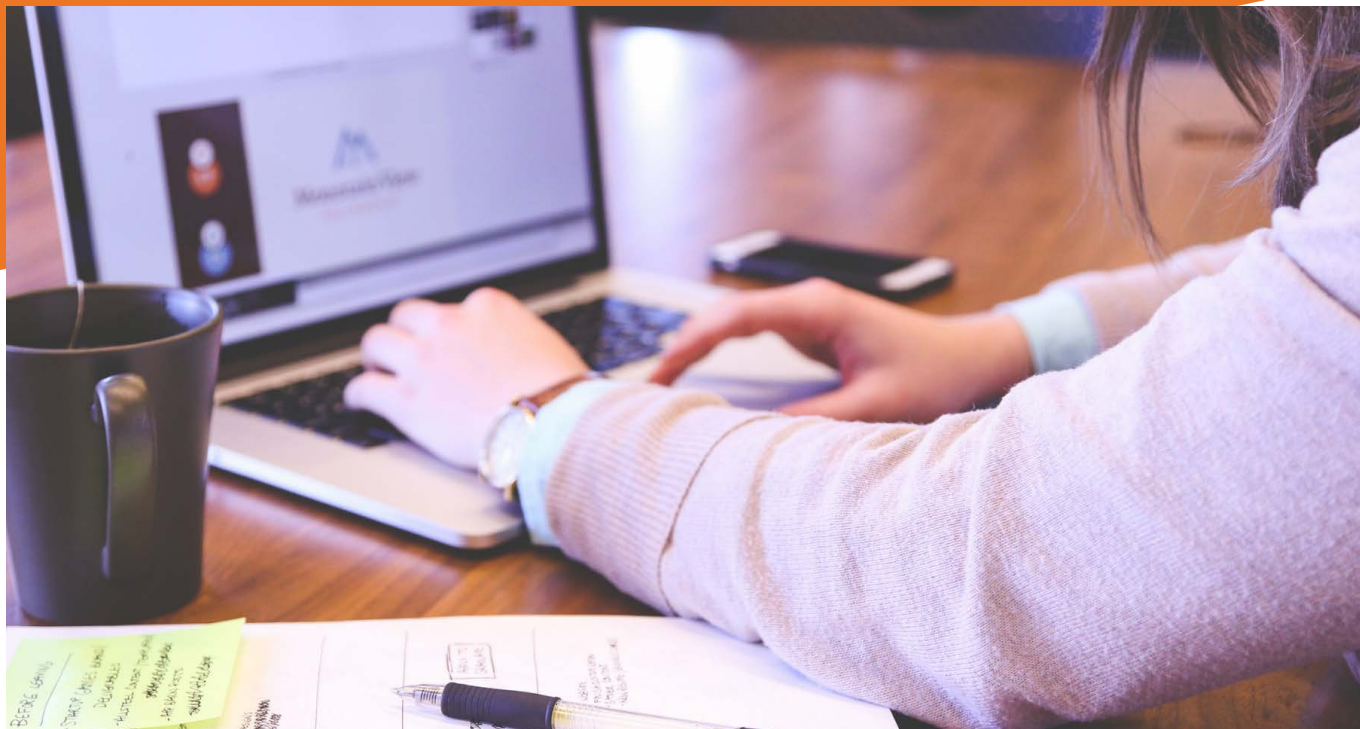
## What's so special about the plain language standard?

The development of the international plain language standard has been approved by the International Standards Organisation (ISO). This means that the final plain language standard will be endorsed by the ISO. You might not be too familiar with the ISO, but trust us, this is a big deal. The ISO is a leader in standards. You could say, it sets the standard for standards!

The ISO has published over 23,000 international standards covering almost every industry, from technology to food safety and many more in between. ISO international standards benefit everyone, everywhere.

## So this means the plain language standard will be taken seriously?

Exactly. If NALA says to a company or business or other organisation, that their documents or web text should meet ISO plain language standards, the organisation will take this very seriously because they take ISO seriously. At the moment, NALA recommends plain English guidelines. By developing ISO international standards, we can continue to improve how information is presented to readers.



## Will the plain language standard only apply to English?

No, the great thing about the plain language standard is that it will apply to most, if not all, languages.

It will also tally with other relevant standards like the WCAG 2.1 – a web accessibility standard to make digital information accessible to everyone. This will be good for all writers and readers in all countries.

## So, what stage is the plain language standard at?

This year NALA and other plain English (language) experts provided feedback on a draft of the plain language standard. We looked at how the plain language standard will help people to provide content that readers need, understand and can easily use.

This feedback will be collected together and analysed. The plan was that the standards would be ready in 2024, but we just heard in October that they will be ready by mid-2021, so this was terrific news.

Stay tuned and we will keep you updated on developments or email or email Claire O'Riordan NALA Plain English Co-ordinator at [coriordan@nala.ie](mailto:coriordan@nala.ie) for more information.

## NALA's commitment to plain language

NALA continues to support organisations in providing clear and accessible information for all readers, especially for those with literacy needs (1 in 6 adults in this country). We do this through our plain English editing and training service.

As part of our new strategic plan, NALA has committed to exploring online training and accreditation options for plain English for the public sector. Thankfully, we have some very good training models from abroad, and good relationships at home to advise us on this work.

We would also like to thank our members for your continued support of plain English. We have received valuable feedback and suggestions about plain English from many people and organisations such as learners, tutors, public servants and you – our valued member. We thank you for this support. It makes a difference.



# Here to help

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## Peer-to-peer literacy projects are transforming the lives of people in Portlaoise Prison.

Forty-one per cent of incarcerated people in Ireland left school before the age of 14. As a result of educational and wider inequalities, the average literacy level of prisoners is much lower than the general population. During the last two years, NALA has been involved in several projects aimed at building the literacy skills and confidence of people who are imprisoned.

### The first year

In February last year, following discussions between Laois and Offaly ETB, NALA and teachers from Portlaoise Prison's Education Unit, it was agreed that NALA would provide training sessions to support the development of a peer-to-peer literacy ambassador programme. The project involved the students raising awareness of literacy among their peers and promoting how literacy can help build confidence, support relationships, health and general feelings of wellbeing.

In summer 2019, the literacy ambassadors planned a project to promote the prison's Education Unit. They designed posters and flyers in plain English and displayed them on different floors, known as landings, throughout the prison. Promotional flyers were also distributed in prison laundry bags for people to find when they collected their laundry. One of the slogans the ambassadors used in the promotional materials was "We are here to help".

The literacy ambassadors said that they gained a lot through their participation in the programme. They felt it helped them share the love of learning they had developed during their time in prison.

Many spoke of feeling like this was their opportunity to give something back to their community and to support others to develop their literacy skills and confidence. Their positive experiences as literacy ambassadors inspired the group to become even more ambitious and teachers in the Education Unit encouraged them to consider training as peer-to-peer literacy tutors.

### Progress in 2020

A year later, six men from the group have graduated as literacy tutors. Despite the summer of lockdown and many hours of isolation in their cells, they have kept their determination to finish their portfolios. They have successfully completed their certificate in the NALA and Waterford IT Developing Literacies 1, a module of the level six Higher Certificate in Arts in Literacy Development.

Feedback from the students who have taken part in the tutor training programme has been overwhelmingly positive. The participants call themselves 'The Peers' and they are known throughout the prison for helping to remove the stigma associated with literacy and going back to education. On the prison landings, it is now a good thing to be seen with books under your arm. The positive impact of 'The Peers' is confirmed by teachers from the Education Unit who say that the numbers of people turning up for support has increased.

## In their own words

Here's what some of the participants taking part in these prison literacy projects have to say:

**"Others wouldn't have an opportunity to come back to education without the work we are doing here."**

**"Some people won't go to the prison's Education Unit to ask for help, but they will come to us."**

**"Us doing this work is breaking down the stigma about literacy."**

**"In the beginning, people see education as a quick way out of prison. They think 'I'm going to play that game!' But when they come to the Education Unit they see how it is here and they begin to enjoy it. It's time away from the negativity of the landings, it's completely different."**

**"People who stay on the landings need to take drugs to survive it, but education can be a way of stopping that."**

**"People say we are doing the right thing using our time here like this. Using it to be educated. Many see it as the best way to do time."**

**"For me tutoring has been an opportunity to sit with people and to create a friendship with someone."**

To find out more about the prison literacy projects that NALA is involved in, please contact Ann Hegarty, NALA's Training Co-ordinator at [ahegarty@nala.ie](mailto:ahegarty@nala.ie)

## Learn with NALA – the new Write On

Call us today on 1800 20 20 65 for a chat about your options.



### Pick a course

Free courses in reading, writing, maths and technology.



### Sign up

Register your details.



### Get credit

Show us what you already know and skip that content.



### Start learning

Get started on your course.

# Learn with NALA

## Join over one hundred centres across Ireland registered with Learn with NALA.

Interested in using Learn with NALA as a blended learning tool for level 1-4 courses? Learn with NALA is free to our members and becoming a registered centre is easy.

There are four easy steps to becoming registered:

1. Become a paid member of NALA as a 'small organisation' or 'large organisation' by visiting **[nala.ie/become-a-member](https://nala.ie/become-a-member)**. If your centre is already a member, check that your membership is up to date by contacting Margaret Murray at **[mmurray@nala.ie](mailto:mmurray@nala.ie)**
2. Register your centre on the Learn with NALA website **[courses.nala.ie](https://courses.nala.ie)**
3. Complete a Memorandum of Understanding. This is contract between NALA and your centre as a user of Learn with NALA and outlines how the platform can be used. Once completed this can be emailed with your centre logo to **[mou@nala.ie](mailto:mou@nala.ie)**
4. Take part in training with NALA (online or face-to-face).

Once your centre is registered, you will receive login details and a Getting Started Guide. As a registered centre, your logo will appear on the home page when your students login. You will also be able to monitor your students' progress with their courses.

**Call us on 1800 20 20 65 for more information.**



## Learn with NALA in numbers



# 59

**Learners**

# 150

**Minor Awards**

Congratulations to the 59 learners who successfully achieved 150 Minor Awards during our first Quality and Qualifications (QQI) certification round on the Learn with NALA website.

71% of these learners were supported in their learning by 11 centres around the country while the remainder worked with NALA tutors or independently.

# Integrating Literacy Course

**NALA's first online professional development course is now live.**

**This introductory course will give you an opportunity to take a step back and reflect on your everyday work.**

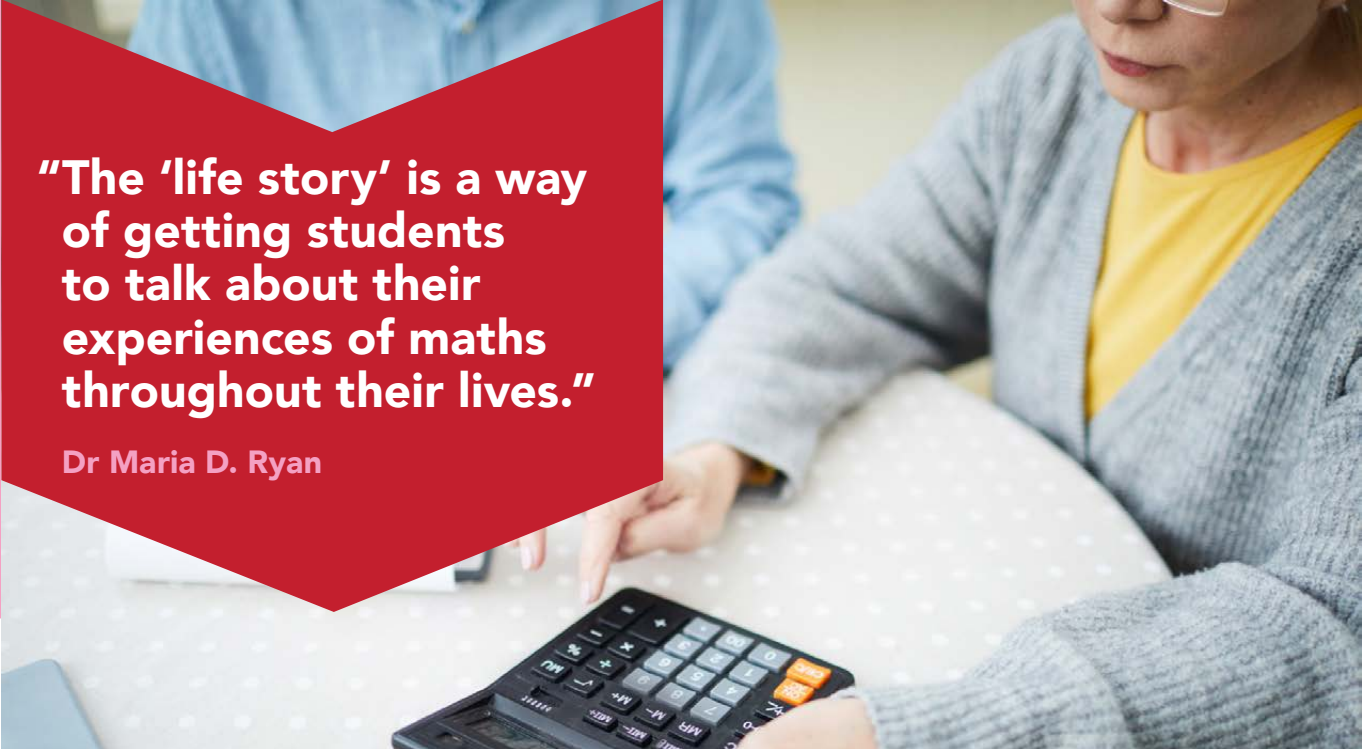
NALA's first online professional development course, **Integrating Literacy into your Teaching**, is now live on Learn with NALA. The course will help you develop your knowledge about literacy and integrating literacy, from both a whole organisation and a practitioner perspective.

This short course is fully online. You can access it at any time and complete it at your own pace.

You will have access to resources and practical tips on how to support your learners with unmet literacy and numeracy needs. You will also hear from practitioners and learners of their experience of integrating literacy in the real world.

After completing the course, you will receive a NALA Professional Development Certificate. We hope you enjoy the course and find it useful for your work.

For more information on NALA's online professional development courses, please contact Gillian Harris at [gharris@nala.ie](mailto:gharris@nala.ie) or visit [courses.nala.ie](https://courses.nala.ie)



**"The 'life story' is a way of getting students to talk about their experiences of maths throughout their lives."**

**Dr Maria D. Ryan**

# How to identify maths anxiety

**Adult learners could have low maths anxiety or high maths anxiety depending on their previous experiences.**

In Ireland, one in four adults struggles with everyday maths such as working out a discount in a shop or dividing up a bill in a restaurant. Many of the adults who return to education to improve their maths skills might also have to overcome what is known as maths anxiety.

Maths anxiety is more than simply not having adequate maths skills. In their 1972 paper on maths anxiety, the American academics, FC Richardson and Richard Suinn, defined it as a "feeling of tension that interferes with the manipulation of numbers and the solving of maths problems in a wide variety of everyday life and academic situations".

Speaking last year at NALA's numeracy conference, Dr Maria D. Ryan, Lecturer in Business, at Mary Immaculate College in Tipperary, explored what makes learners anxious about maths.

"A lot of the time a person's maths anxiety is related to the experience they had in school. For example, failing to solve a maths problem in front of classmates or not being able to solve a problem quick enough are just two things that could lead to maths anxiety later in life. A lot of the time, being good at maths was taken as a sign of intelligence and this attitude would have had a negative effect on people who struggled with maths," says Maria.

According to Maria, adult learners could have low maths anxiety or high maths anxiety depending on their previous experiences. She highlighted how maths tutors can identify if a learner has low or high maths anxiety.

“People with low maths anxiety will have issues about maths but are still proactive about learning. They might have received some support from parents or teachers when they were younger. They are keen to understand maths concepts and are aware of how these concepts relate to everyday life. They will be very engaged with their learning and look for extra resources and useful reading related to their maths study. They will be prepared for class and exams and will seek support if they need it,” she said.

It’s a different story for people that have high maths anxiety.

“Very often people with high maths anxiety will have received little or no support from teachers in school. They are likely to have trouble grasping maths concepts and may well resort to rote learning in order to pass an exam. They tend to avoid everyday or work situations involving numbers or calculations, and this can have a detrimental effect on their career development. People with high maths anxiety are also much less likely to seek support and help,” she said.

## Helping learners with maths anxiety

Maria said that she uses a practice called the ‘life story’ to identify if learners have low or high maths anxiety.

“The ‘life story’ approach is a way of getting students to talk about their experiences of maths throughout their lives. I might ask them to tell me about their earliest memory of using maths or what their experience of maths in primary school was. I might also ask them to think about if there was anybody, such as a parent or teacher, who might have influenced the way they view maths. Giving people space

to talk about their previous maths experience is very important because it helps them come to terms with it and move on” she said.

“The ‘life story’ can run right up to the present time and can be forward looking as well. This can help students identify situations where maths will be important in their lives in the future.”

While maths anxiety can be difficult to overcome, Maria said that adult learners are resilient and used to challenging situations.

“I have found that most adult learners are highly motivated to learn and they will persevere with it. Not all adult learners will have maths anxiety, but if they do, it’s important to identify if it’s low or high anxiety, so you know the right level of support to offer.”

## Resources for tutors

For Maths Week 2020 NALA hosted a series of webinars on numeracy and maths. These covered a range of topics including teaching financial maths, algebra, fractions, numeracy in context and making sense of area and perimeter.

Recordings of these webinars are now available at

**[nala.ie/maths-week-webinar-series](https://nala.ie/maths-week-webinar-series)**





**"It felt great to be part of something again, have a focus and sense of involvement."**

**Dublin Simon Community client**

# Learning through lockdown

**As COVID-19 continued to have an impact, some of our members shared how they have been finding innovative ways to keep learners engaged.**

## **Dublin Simon Community – Client Development team**

From the beginning of lockdown in March the Client Development team in Dublin Simon Community started designing activity packs and circulating them to the people accessing their service.

These packs feature positive affirmations, mindfulness colouring, word searches, crosswords, information from Sure Steps counselling, health and wellbeing activities and much more!

The packs are available to download for free from the Dublin Simon Community website at [dubsimon.ie/news/client-development-activity-pack](https://dubsimon.ie/news/client-development-activity-pack)

A client of Dublin Simon Community's services explains how useful the packs were. "The Client Development activity pack, which was sent out to the hostels, was truly my 'life support'. It felt great to be part of something again, have a focus and sense of involvement. The mindfulness colouring was one activity which filled many hours of my day."

## City of Edinburgh Council, South West Adult Learning team

Before COVID-19 the City of Edinburgh Council, South West Adult Learning team delivered 'Guid Fer a Laugh' sessions on the Scots language and comedy to community groups in South West Edinburgh.



The Adult Learning team highlighted this as one of the positive aspects of lockdown that it gave the opportunity to share resources between sectors and geographical areas. It brought people together to provide much needed activities for isolated adults. There is hopes for future development post COVID-19 such as cross-generational sessions with schools and adult groups.



There was a need identified by members of the Oxfangs Forum in South West Edinburgh for activity packs for isolated adults who did not have access to the internet. The material from Scot Literacy 'Guid Fer a Laugh' was adapted into an activity packs and promoted through local forums, community and national organisations.

The packs were sent to organisations who put the packs into their food and activity bags. The packs were also adapted to suit the individual or group's needs. They have been used by carers, support workers, volunteers, health and social care professionals, families and individuals.

# Check in, Take off

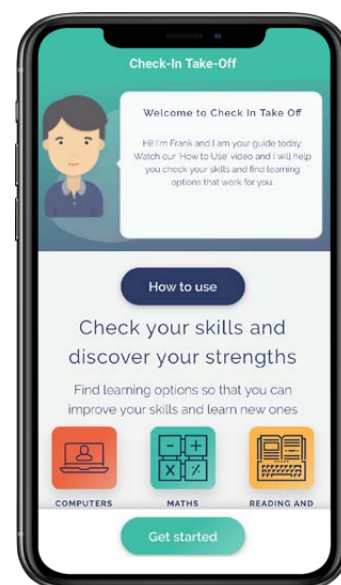
**A new online application that learners can use to check their skills and find out about learning opportunities.**

According to the European Commission, one in five European adults struggles with basic reading and writing, numeracy or using digital tools in everyday life. Adults with basic skills and with a low-level qualification are at a higher risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Education has the power to transform the lives of learners, their families and their communities and plays an important role in addressing social division and inequality.

In 2019, NALA started working on the development of a new online experience that supports adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital needs for the ERASMUS+ Check-In-Take-Off (CITO) project. The project will create a free, accessible, motivating online tool that learners can use to self-assess their skills and find out about learning opportunities that suit their needs.

Our partners in the project include Malta's Ministry of Education and Employment, Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), and Fønix AS from Norway. To create the online tool we partnered with Learnovate, a research and innovation centre focused on education and learning technology.

Following our ten-month collaboration with Learnovate, we have recently completed the development of the Check In, Take Off web application (CITO App) for Ireland, Malta and Norway.



**The project will create a free, accessible, motivating online tool that learners can use to self-assess their skills.**

We have created a scenario-based reflective experience which encourages learners to think about how well they would deal with specific tasks. The tasks are linked to the National Framework of Qualifications and the European Qualification Framework for literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Throughout October and November, we will be testing the CITO App with learners and organisations across Malta, Ireland, and Norway. Learners can tell us about their experience of using the CITO app and how it helped them identify ways to improve their skills.

In Ireland, we are excited to announce that the following organisations are taking part in our research; Keelings, An Cosán, Louth Leadership Partnership, DEASP - North East Division, NALA's Distance Learning Service, Galway and Roscommon ETB, Waterford and Wexford ETB, Longford and Westmeath ETB, Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB, and Donegal ETB.

You can find out more about the CITO project and our latest news and updates by heading to our website **[www.citoproject.eu](http://www.citoproject.eu)**



# Watch our recent webinars

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**NALA have hosted a range of webinars over the last few months that might be useful.**

## Literacy changes lives

On International Literacy Day NALA hosted a webinar to explore the importance of literacy, numeracy and digital skills in the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. We also discussed the upcoming government 10-year adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills strategy that will be developed in the coming months.

## Reading webinar series

We held a series of adult literacy webinars for tutors, focused on reading. We looked at areas such as building reading relationships, family reading and strategies for teaching reading.

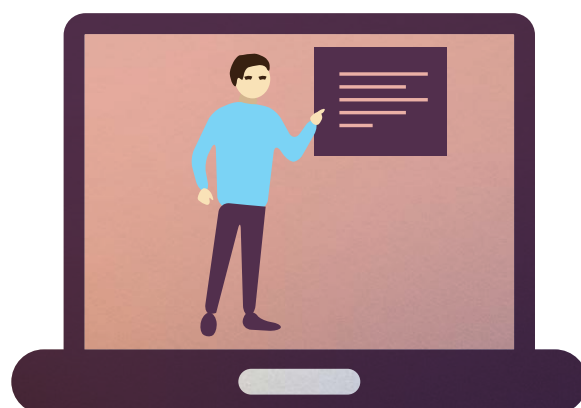
## Building Literacy Equality series

NALA is hosting a series of open access webinars discussing the relationship between literacy and its pivotal role in building a healthier, more participatory, engaged, joyful and equal society. Part One and Part Two are now available to watch online where we discussed the role of learning care.

## Student webinar series

To replace our Student Day, NALA hosted a Student Webinar series for adults improving their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. In these webinars we covered using Zoom and Whatsapp, building critical thinking skills, climate change, health and everyday maths. If you would like to arrange a bespoke webinar for your students on any of these topics please register your interest by emailing Margaret Murray NALA Student and Membership Officer at [mmurray@nala.ie](mailto:mmurray@nala.ie)

All webinars are now available to watch on the NALA Youtube channel  
[youtube.com/NalaIreland](https://www.youtube.com/NalaIreland)



# Dates for the Diary

## Upcoming NALA Webinars

### Family Learning Series

**23 – 27 November**

NALA will be putting on five webinars focused on Family Learning. These webinars will cover topics such as creating a mindful classroom, fairytales and folklore, reading and using the library, telling stories via Zoom and building resilience for you and your child.

### Literacy Awareness Training

**9 December 2020**

This webinar will give you top tips about how you or your organisation can be more accessible to people with literacy or numeracy difficulties. NALA can also arrange specific webinars for your organisation. Contact Fergus Dolan at **fdolan@nala.ie** to find out more.

For more information on upcoming webinars, training and events please visit **[nala.ie/events](https://www.nala.ie/events)**

### Message for NALA Members

If you have any queries about your membership or would like to update how you hear from us, please contact Margaret Murray NALA Student and Membership Officer at **mmurray@nala.ie**

### National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)

Sandford Lodge  
Sandford Close  
Ranelagh, Dublin 6

**Phone:** 01 412 7900

**Freephone:** 1 800 20 20 65

**Website:** [www.nala.ie](https://www.nala.ie)

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 [nalairland](https://www.facebook.com/nalairland)  [@nalairland](https://twitter.com/nalairland)



Ireland's European Structural and  
Investment Funds Programmes  
2014-2020  
Co-funded by the Irish Government  
and the European Union



European Union  
Investing in Your Future  
European Social Fund

Adult literacy is co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.



**Changing life stories 1980 - 2020**