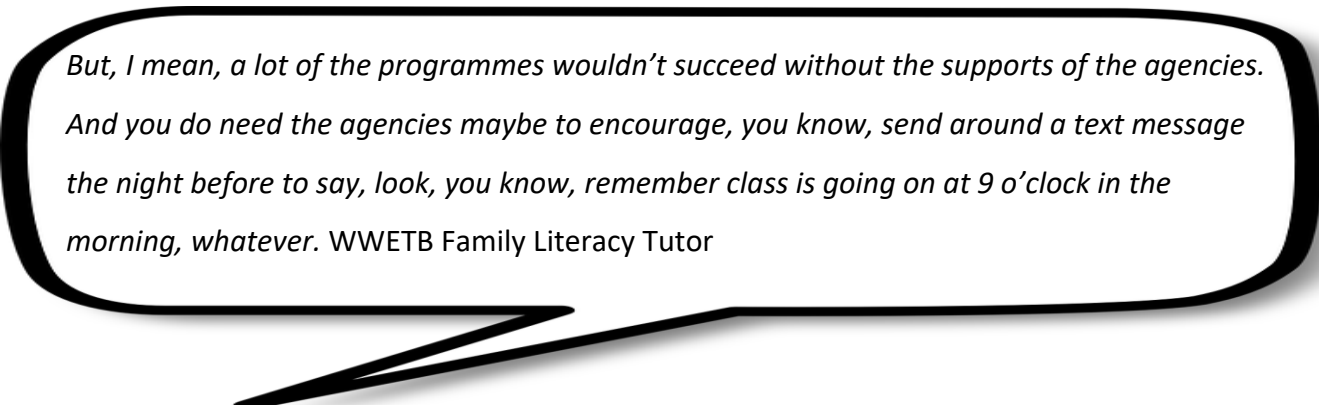


Good practice example - Waterford and Wexford ETB, engaging and retaining marginalised parents

Waterford and Wexford ETB have had great success in engaging with marginalised parents. While family learning is never wasted, there are priorities of need and ETBs often mention the difficulty in connecting with 'reluctant' adults whose prior learning experiences and present life circumstances keep learning low on their personal and family learning agenda. Building positive relationships with community organisations is often the key factor in helping ETBs contact those in greatest need. Work is ongoing with some DEIS schools HSCL teachers, HSE and Waterford Institute of Technology.

WWETB also works closely with Focus Ireland and Respond to provide for learners experiencing homelessness and mental health issues-issues that often make it more difficult for learners to be consistent in how they deal with family learning demands. Focus Ireland and Respond Facebook pages were cited as evidence of how social media can be a useful point of information exchange. With more than a hundred users, the page is an important means of engaging new learners through a trusted community of practice.



But, I mean, a lot of the programmes wouldn't succeed without the supports of the agencies. And you do need the agencies maybe to encourage, you know, send around a text message the night before to say, look, you know, remember class is going on at 9 o'clock in the morning, whatever. WWETB Family Literacy Tutor

In New Ross, a group of learners, women and men, and their tutor discussed the benefits they had reaped from family learning and their advice for attracting others in from the margins. The tutor had begun as a family literacy learner and progressed to qualify as a family learning tutor. Her empathy with the learners was evident and, her relationship with them is based on a special and recent understanding of the learner experience.

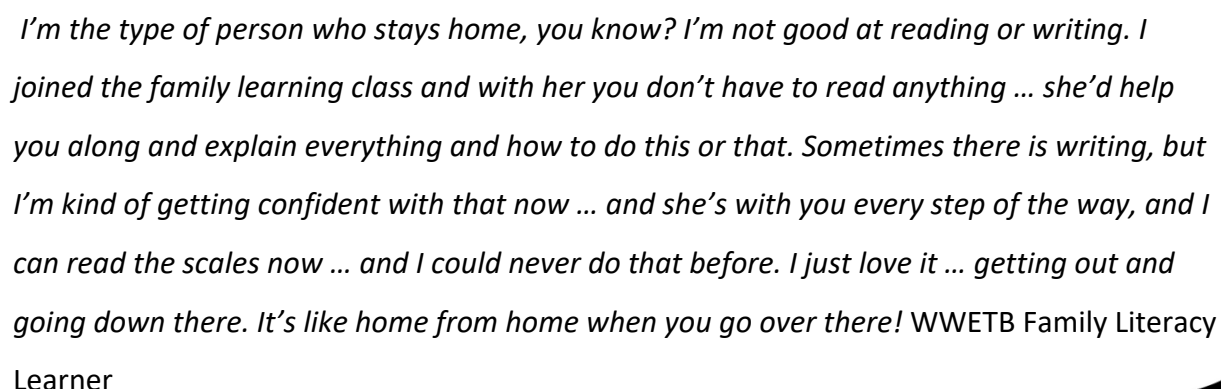
Learners appreciated this tutor's approach, as it helped them to feel relaxed and receptive to learning.

That's a big change for me too... when we were young education was completely different. There was no connection between the teachers and the pupils. It's far more relaxed now.
WWETB Family Literacy Learner

From the outset, family learning providers were careful to assure people that engagement in learning would entail no hidden costs. Even the fear of hidden costs can mean a learner doesn't return the second week.

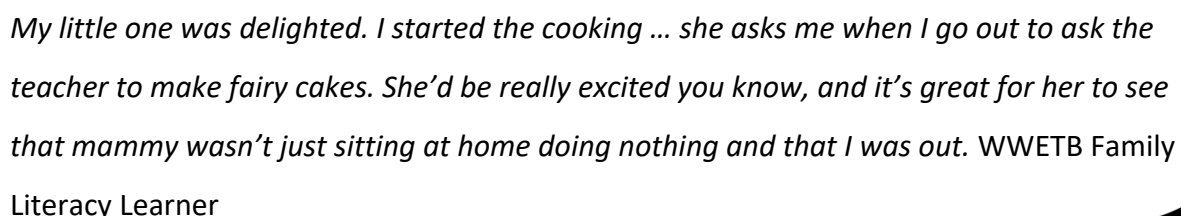
So like the first days of family learning we would actually outline, you know, that say if it was held on nutrition, like, that we'd provide the ingredients. All those kind of things that will actually encourage them to come back. WWETB Family Literacy Tutor

Learners, in turn, described being given a positive introduction to a particular tutor by friends - and finding the experience with that tutor life changing. From a position of isolation and unmet literacy needs, one learner became engaged in a family cookery class. She felt more confident working on literacy and became conscious of her ability to learning and the new skills she was acquiring. Paramount in all of this was the basic capacity to leave the home and become integrated in a supportive learning environment.



I'm the type of person who stays home, you know? I'm not good at reading or writing. I joined the family learning class and with her you don't have to read anything ... she'd help you along and explain everything and how to do this or that. Sometimes there is writing, but I'm kind of getting confident with that now ... and she's with you every step of the way, and I can read the scales now ... and I could never do that before. I just love it ... getting out and going down there. It's like home from home when you go over there! WWETB Family Literacy Learner

Despite sizeable barriers to reengaging with learning, people had positive things to say about their social, health and learning outcomes. Engaging those with mental health issues and multiple disadvantages in family learning can transform the lives of children and parents in ways that are difficult to capture in annual returns. One mother described the layers of satisfaction prompted by her return to family learning.



My little one was delighted. I started the cooking ... she asks me when I go out to ask the teacher to make fairy cakes. She'd be really excited you know, and it's great for her to see that mammy wasn't just sitting at home doing nothing and that I was out. WWETB Family Literacy Learner

The school remarked on the increased presence of one mother in the school and her obvious involvement in her child's learning. Others were aware of parents who, through family learning programmes, had begun volunteering as a Reading Buddy in school, joined the school Management Board or merely been seen more often in the community. The wider cultural shift that takes place in families means that family learning is impacting on cycles of educational disadvantage, and, where successful, family learning disrupts these cycles. *This is a summary.* [Click here](#) to read more in: **Family Literacy Practice in ETBs Guidelines, Case Studies and Recommendations Pages 38 – 41.**