

EXPLORE



The quarterly magazine from AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation

aontas



In this issue:

- *Valuing adult learning*
- *Festival 2011 – Making adult learning visible*
- *Inspiring learners – Meet the learners behind the Festival advertising campaign*
- *Creative learning – From car maintenance to housing and community studies!*

AONTAS: The Voice of Adult Learning

Note from the Editor

Hello and welcome to another issue of *Explore*!

In this edition, we look forward to the AONTAS AGM and the launch of our new strategic plan which will run from 2011 to 2013. The plan is the outcome of an extensive consultation process with learners, providers and other relevant stakeholders in the sector. At the AGM, members will get the opportunity to put these themes into action.

The consultation process unearthed three key themes which are further explored in this issue through the lens of the Adult Learners' Festival which took place at the end of February in advance of a crucial General Election. Promoting greater **visibility** of the sector was a central theme identified by those who contributed. Both the STAR Awards and Festival events around the country provide practical examples of how adult learning can become more visible. This year over four hundred events took place during the Festival. The Festival was covered extensively in community, local and online media. The Festival also featured as part of RTE's Winning Streak programme, where South Tipperary VEC hosted a range of activities which really illustrated the diversity of adult learning for the cameras.

The **value** of adult learning is explored in greater detail by Berni Brady in an editorial on this issue. AONTAS recently made a submission to the Department of Education

and Skills outlining the role of community education in meeting the targets set by the National Skills Strategy. Elena Gamble from the DIT outlines the potential for community based learning – where NGOs and civil society organisations can work collaboratively with third level institutions and international partners.

The theme of **voice** reflects the importance of representation for both learners and providers. In this issue we profile three inspiring adult learners who took part in our advertising campaign in advance of the Festival. Damien Walshe, AONTAS Learning Advocacy Officer visits a recent event held by the Limerick Adult Learners' Forum.

Thanks to all who contributed reports, photos and articles to this issue. We look forward to engaging with our membership through these difficult times to ensure a greater profile for adult learning. Finally, we look forward to communicating the experiences of learners, providers and adult guidance initiatives to a new government, and ensuring the sector can fulfil its potential in creating a better future.

Until next time,

Niamh Farren,
Communications Officer
AONTAS

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Explore offers discount advertising rates to all community and voluntary groups. To find out more about advertising in future issues, contact Niamh Farren, Communications Officer, AONTAS, Tel: 01 406 8220, email: nfarren@aontas.com.

Adult learners and the Programme for Government

AONTAS's campaign in the lead up to the general election highlighted a number of issues articulated by our members. These included the public sector recruitment embargo, which is having a severe impact on the sector to meet the need for adult learning. The campaign material also highlighted the gradual erosion of financial supports for adult learners, as well as the need for quality information for adults who want to return to education.

The Programme for Government outlines a number of interesting commitments in relation to adult education. The Programme for Government states '*Lifelong Learning, community education and vocational training for job seekers will be a high priority*' (Page 43).

Specific measures include:

- The introduction of additional places on training courses, internships and schemes for people who are unemployed
- Expanding the eligibility for the Back to Education Allowance
- A new National Employment and Entitlements Service to replace FÁS, and which will be managed by the Department of Social Protection. This new

Minister Quinn announces appointment of John Walshe as his Special Adviser

The Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Ruairi Quinn TD, recently announced the appointment of John Walshe, Education Editor with the Irish Independent, as his Special Adviser. The Minister said he was looking forward to using John's knowledge of the education system

to further the Government's agenda for change and for the delivery of a high quality educational experience to students at all levels.

John Walshe is Education Editor with the Irish Independent as well as Irish correspondent for a range of international education publications. He is a former consultant to the OECD where he was involved in preparing four publications relating to teacher professional devel-

opment, student motivation, adult education, and new forms of school management.

He also spent a period working as education correspondent with The Irish Times.

He is a graduate of both NUI Galway and UCC and his M.Ed thesis formed the basis of 'A New Partnership in Education' which was published by the Institute of Public Administration.



Ruairi Quinn, Minister for Education and Skills

service will provide information about benefits and entitlements as well as supporting people into training and education.

Ruairi Quinn, Labour Party TD was appointed Minister for Education and Skills. Ciaran Cannon of Fine Gael has been appointed Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills, with responsibility for Training and Skills. We wish both Ministers well in their new roles and look forward to working with them.

More details about the Programme for Government are available from the AONTAS website.

'Adult learning is a central task for the 21st century' – conference discusses results of EU Action Plan

Over the three days, experts from the world of adult education discussed the EU's Adult Learning Action Plan, at a conference in Budapest, 7-9 March. The conference underlined the need for adult learning, more than ever before, to contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe, as part of its economic recovery, and in response to its ageing, multicultural and constantly changing societies. Participants agreed that future priorities should concentrate on enabling adults cope with change and transitions in their lives and jobs. One of the main issues highlighted was how to achieve efficient expansion

of the sector at a time of economic austerity.

The purpose of the conference was to take stock of results achieved over the past three years of European cooperation in the field of adult learning and to use lessons and experiences learned to formulate better and more effective strategies for the future.

Despite progress, reforms, innovations in many countries and regions, the hard fact remains that the population of adult non-learners is 50 million more than it was 10 years ago. Achieving key competences, including adequate literacy, numeracy and digital skills, is still a problem among a third of the workforce, many of whom will need to upgrade their skills to remain in employment.

Adult learning experts and civil society organisations joined with social partners and representatives from public authorities across Europe

in underlining the central importance of adult learning in tackling the Union's skills deficits and building a cohesive and pluralist society. As keynote speaker Ms Maria João Rodrigues, Special Advisor to the EU Presidencies and to the European Commission, put it, "Adult learning is a central task for the 21st century – vital to enabling people to make the most of their lives and jobs and therefore an essential element in the Union's EU2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth."

The conference gave a strong impetus to the Commission's work in the field of adult learning. The orientations developed at the conference will help shape a new Adult Learning Action Plan to be launched later this year in the framework of the Education and Training 2020 strategy to support the development of a strong and responsive adult learning sector in Europe.

Sowing the Learning Seeds

'Sowing the Learning Seeds' is the title of a Grundtvig Learning Partnership project which includes AONTAS as a partner. Seven countries are involved: Slovenia, Estonia, France, Turkey, Hungary and the Netherlands are the other partners. The project aims to share information about best practice in learning campaigns across participating countries. The first meeting took place in Dublin, where delegations from partner countries participated in the Adult Learners' Festival. Their visit included a workshop on the theme of volunteering and adult learning. The Estonian delegation also travelled to Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre in Galway.

The next phase of the project involves a group from Ireland participating in the Slovenian Adult Learners Week. Representatives from Ireland include Niamh Farren, AONTAS Communications Officer, Kathryn Laing, Adult Learners' Festival Administration Officer, Loretta



Sowing the Learning Seeds participants at the STAR Awards Ceremony

Needham, Manager, Croí na Gaillimhe and AONTAS Executive Member, and Ger Canning, Chairperson of the Adult Education Officers Association. The group hopes to learn new ideas from the trip to Slovenia. The next issue of Explore will include a feature about the Slovenian visit.

New Minister addresses NALA AGM

NALA's AGM took place on Saturday March 26th at the Gresham Hotel. The event was one of the first formal engagements for new Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn.

During the keynote address, the Minister affirmed his commitment to addressing the issue of literacy in a number of ways. As part of its Labour Market Policy, the Government will make literacy and basic workplace skills a national priority, with literacy training incorporated into a wider variety of further education and training programmes. The Government will also address the widespread and persistent problem of adult literacy through the integration of literacy in vocational training and through community education under its lifelong learning policy.

'So, in terms of the Government's position on adult literacy – it is recognised as a priority area within a broader suite of provision targeting the low qualified and the low skilled. We recognise that unemployment



Inez Bailey, Director of NALA, with Ruairi Quinn Minister for Education and Skills, at their recent AGM

affects those with low skills more seriously than it might other groups. We recognise that into the future, for the jobs of tomorrow, people are going to require higher levels of skills and we need to focus on the low qualified and the low skilled if we are to succeed in that regard,' said the Minister.

The meeting also elected a new chairperson – Gretta Vaughan. Gretta takes over from Michael Power, who formally stepped down at the meeting.

Irish Men's Sheds Association Meeting

Following on from the extremely successful meeting of the Irish Men's Sheds Association (IMSA) in Tipperary in January, the IMSA met in Arklow CDP on the 14th March. The first part of the meeting allowed Sheds to share information about work they are undertaking as well as those new to the idea of Sheds to ask questions. After this part of the meeting, Shed members were taken to see the new boat building project being undertaken by the Arklow Men's Shed which will build a boat over the course of the next 14 weeks. The second part of the meeting saw the representatives from



A meeting of the Men's Sheds Association in Arklow

the Men's Sheds come together to decide on operational structures for the organisation and key tasks for the IMSA over the course of the year. Key developments were that the IMSA have decided to ask members to participate in a competition to design a logo for the organisation and that the steering group decided to ask for a voluntary contribution from each shed towards the

costs of moving IMSA forward and that a submission made on behalf of the IMSA has made it to the shortlist of 42 entries for the Social Entrepreneurs bootcamp 2011.

The next meeting of the IMSA will take place on Friday 24th June in St Munchin's Family Resource Centre. For more information, check out www.menssheds.ie.

Responding to a need for Housing and Community Studies

Respond! Housing Association offers a Bachelor of Social Studies (BSS) in Housing and Community Studies. This is the only degree of its kind in Ireland, which was developed following intense collaboration between Respond! Housing and UCD. Respond! has been at the forefront in Ireland of providing high quality, low cost housing for nearly 30 years. The organisation was responsible for the first Rental Subsidy Scheme (RSS) estate in Ireland and since its inception has also designed and built a variety of housing schemes, communal facilities and several group homes for local community groups across the country. Niamh Farren spoke to Joanne Richards, Course Director at Respond! about how the initiative developed.

Joanne, this is an unusual subject for study. How was the need for the course identified?

Respond! has always been very committed to building communities as well as building the physical environment in which communities exist. Education is a priority and the various courses delivered by Respond! to residents eventually developed into a certificate, then a diploma and finally a degree which is now delivered in partnership with the Social Policy Department in University College Dublin. This ensures a balance of the experiential and the academic which is particularly beneficial in the study of housing and community, and for adult learners.

The study of housing is increasingly significant, as we seek to recover from an unregulated banking sector and an overheated housing market. Respond! is very committed to the development of a national housing policy which would be inclusive, fair and would acknowledge the significance of housing in our lives and our society. So at heart there is a sense of mission, that in a very real way you cannot just build houses, you have



The BSS Graduation Group

to build homes and facilitate communities. The degree really came out of that belief.

How did the course develop to be fully accredited?

Respond! education seeks to create a career pathway in housing and community for those in local government, public service, community and voluntary sectors. The Bachelor of Social Studies in Housing and Community Studies degree (BSS) was established in response to the need for academic and practitioner-informed training to underpin a pro-

fessional career path in housing.

Respond! pioneered and developed this 4-year part-time degree with UCD, which progresses from Certificate, Diploma to Degree levels. The BSS degree aims to equip students with an understanding of the multi-disciplinary nature of housing and community development, resource distribution and housing management skills. In the BSS degree the student will examine the complexities of social life and see how individuals and groups live and work together. They will also explore how best to respond to individual

needs and to the particular requirements of marginalised members of society.

Learners on the BSS degree programme have full access to the resources of the university.

The accreditation processes have stretched back over many years. The degree was already fully formed before we went into partnership with UCD but that relationship has been very beneficial over the years as we have access to experts in Irish (and international) housing. The partnership between Respond! and UCD has been in place since the degree commenced in 2003.

What is the typical profile of your course participants?

Initially the degree was established with the aim of generating a greater understanding of housing and community issues for practitioners working in the sectors. The typical profile of the students was a mix of local authority staff, representatives from different organisations in the sector and students entering the field of social studies with the aim of gaining employment in the sector. Due to the very inclusive approach to recruitment, this latter group consisted of many people for whom third level education had never previously been a realistic option.

More recently the profile of the students has shifted to one whereby the majority of students are people with some level of experience in the community and voluntary sector, be that paid or voluntary work. The part-time nature of the course provides them with the opportunity to gain a degree qualification while continuing to work or seek employ-

ment in the field. Local authority staff in particular have always been a tremendous asset to the course, due to their understanding of many of the key issues.

What are the employment opportunities for course participants?

Many of the students already work within the sector so for them it is a case of seeking promotion or improving their CV. Others would like to move into the sector and the degree's flexibility is very useful when contemplating a move. It is a social policy degree with a focus on housing and on community and therefore is very versatile when job searching.

How does the course delivery and methodology reflect the learning needs of adults?

The degree is delivered in such a way that the learning needs of adults are of paramount concern. In terms of the course content and delivery, the approach to learning is very much built on a mix of participatory, experiential and lecture based methods. Group work exercises and active involvement of the students in the learning is a fundamental part of the learning throughout the degree.

The timetable for the course is based around two full days of contact hours. There are a number of tutorials held; these happen in various locations and at various times in order to facilitate all the students. Distance learning options are available in Cork and Galway and we are looking to expand these. Respond! acknowledge the balancing-act all

adults must perform when returning to education so there is flexibility in attendance for the tutorials and providing additional support for students is common practice.

Course fees amount to €2900 annually. Respond! also offers a payment scheme whereby students can pay on a monthly basis.

A learners view...

Gerry Murphy, Ennis Town Council

"The degree helped me feel more confident talking and debating issues and it has helped me on my way to complete my masters in public administration. The social policy side is good to have and to be able to mix it in with economic and finance issues is great although not easy at times.

I am delighted to have completed it and listened along the way to other people's experiences, and how they solved problems or failed as the case may be.

I work in the environment section of Ennis Town Council and use all of what I have learned over the four years on the BSS on a regular basis, from forming residents groups, dealing with disputes, dealing with co-workers, and higher management explaining complex issues regarding some of the most vulnerable in society. It has given me confidence in my ability to speak on topics, and assist the public and my employer in finding solutions to problems that arise."

For more information visit www.respond.ie, call 0818 357901 or email joanne.richards@respond.ie or declan.markey@respond.ie.

Opportunities in the midst of recession

Adult Education Guidance Officer Eilis Coyne describes how Meath VEC is meeting the challenges of recession.

In 2010 Co. Meath VEC received funding under the Labour Market Activation Fund to provide 600 training places at FETAC Level 3. This was in addition to the 100 training places offered at FETAC Level 5. These courses were particularly targeted at unemployed people between the ages of 18 and 35 or the long term unemployed. All courses were offered free, in a number of locations throughout the county and offered flexible

attendance options. Meath Adult Education Guidance Initiative organised information sessions in a number of venues around the county and set up a free phone number – 1800 991 898 – to assist with queries.

Co. Meath VEC recently started a blog on their website. The following is an extract from their blog which illustrates an individual's experience of returning to education through Meath VEC.

Having lost my job, my home and my dignity, I did not think things could get any worse. I was wrong, my first visit to the Social Welfare Office reminded me of the Oliver Twist movie where Oliver goes up with his bowl in his hand and asks for more. Well I wasn't even asking for more, I was simply asking for my legal entitlement, I had paid my PAYE and PRSI for more years than I care to remember, and now I was without work for the first time in my life.

Over the following weeks as I was left in economic limbo I had to visit the Community Welfare Officer, queuing for hours in the rain as the office was too small to hold the number of people who had recently been made redundant. Those who have experienced this will know what I am talking about. Those who have not

will never understand. For several months I wallowed in self-pity, I spent many hours telling anyone who would listen how cruel the world had been to me.

Just as I was settling into a routine of Monday visits to the FÁS Office to look for jobs that don't exist, I happened to see an advertisement in the Meath Chronicle for a range of new courses being offered by Meath VEC. I did not immediately rush off to Meath VEC and sign up. Firstly I went through every excuse as to why I should not return to education. When I was a child I had been badly treated at school. In the end my excuses were heavily outweighed by my determination to get back into the work place, why should I sit about in a constant state of depression just because a small handful of people had bankrupted our country?

So I found myself signing up for a full time course with Meath VEC. This decision was only taken after talking with Meath VEC staff and being guided in the right direction. I will now spend the next year up-skilling myself. I know I still don't have any money, but I have got my self-respect back. I have a spring in my step every morning as I have a reason to get up and get going each day. Everyone around me is benefiting from my decision to return to education, they can see that the real me has returned from that dark place where I had hidden for several months. To any mature person out there I would say, "Be Not Afraid", drop into your local VEC centre and ask for advice, change your life and the quality of life for yourself and those around you.

Meath VEC AEG: Drop in Information Times – Tuesday 9.30am – 12.30pm and Thursday 2.30pm – 4.00pm.

Eilis can be reached on 046 9068249 or email eilcoyne@meathvec.ie.

Valuing adult learning

During the recent AONTAS strategic planning process, the 'value' of adult learning was one of three themes expressed strongly by members. In this article, Berni Brady considers how AONTAS will progress these themes.

New opportunities

2011 looks like a year full of opportunities for AONTAS as we embark on a new and ambitious strategic plan which focuses on making the key role of adult and community education visible, and giving a voice to adult learners. With a new government in place we can see new possibilities for the sector, starting with recognition of its role, not just in bringing about an economic recovery but also in contributing to social cohesion, two key priorities for government. We welcome the new Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn and we are happy to see the retention of a Minister of State at the Department which was a key priority of our pre-election campaign. We look forward to building a strong relationship with the new Minister for Training and Skills, Ciaran Cannon. The core of our plan to be adopted by our members at the AGM in May is the value of adult learning for both the individual and the communities in which we all live. Our challenge is convincing government of the importance of that role and the necessity to support it especially during the current crisis. Demand for adult education and training opportunities is at an all time high as the financial crisis deepens, and service providers are being challenged to respond to that demand with diminishing resources.

National and international research, the most recent being the AONTAS study on the outcomes of DES funded community education, has shown that adult and community education has multiple benefits for people, ranging through upskilling, health, personal development and civic engagement. Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of the research was the increase in volunteering as an outcome of being involved in community education, resulting in a significant monetary return to the state. Adult and community education also meets national policy priorities for all learners, including targeting the most disadvantaged groups, at the qualification levels



Berni Brady, AONTAS Director, Seamus Hempenstall, Principal Officer Further Education Section, DES, and Natasha Bailey, Researcher, at the launch of 'More than just a course' research

identified in the National Skills Strategy by delivering a highly effective, responsive form of education provision. A key strength of the sector is its learner-centred philosophy and practice. It has developed strategies, approaches and supports that encourage learners back to education and enable them to develop their confidence, skills and abilities.

Listening to the voice of learners

Over the next three years AONTAS plans to build on those strengths by developing a national forum for adult learners designed to strengthen their voice, to draw on their rich experience of learning and to contribute that voice and experience to policy and practice in the sector. The work is already in progress following the organisation of the inaugural meeting of the forum in November 2010



Berni Brady and Michael D. Higgins, Labour Party President, at the STAR Awards Ceremony

and the recruitment of a Learning Advocacy Officer in December. Through the work of the Learning Advocacy Officer AONTAS is steadily building links with learners throughout the country with a view to hosting a national event in the Autumn of 2011. Of course the achievements of learners are the key focus of the STAR awards ceremony which launches the annual Adult Learners' Festival. Once again we were able to showcase the wide variety of learning outcomes for adults of all ages and abilities. The testimonies of adult learners bear witness to the importance of learning throughout life and make the strongest case for the support of the adult and community education service. This year learners themselves provided the voice for the radio advertisements promoting the Festival and this proved to be hugely successful. The promotion of the learner voice through social media also spread the message that adult learning is for everyone.

Making adult learning visible

In terms of visibility for the sector the Festival plays a key role in highlighting and promoting the work of providers as well as learners at a national level. Over the period of our last strategic plan we have developed strong partnerships and links with a wide range of stakeholders and have drawn on our strong relationships with service providers. A recent example of this was the hugely successful and enjoyable collaboration with Tipperary South VEC at the beginning of the Festival in February, where their

Adult and community education also meets national policy priorities for all learners, including targeting the most disadvantaged groups

work was showcased on the Winning Streak programme on national television as a result of AONTAS's connection with the National Lottery. Such a collaboration illustrates the strengths of both organisations; the VEC as a service provider and AONTAS as a promoter. Using these combined strengths we collectively have the capacity to bring a high level of recognition for the work of the adult and community education service, and break down territorial boundaries which often prevent us from fully fulfilling our potential as both service providers and advocates. AONTAS plans to develop these strategies through the life of its new strategic plan by building on our relationships with our VEC members and supporting them to promote their work.

The role of community education

AONTAS has already built a solid platform for its community-based members through the establishment and support of the Community Education Network and has made a strong case to the Department of Education and Skills in a submission in February about the role of

AONTAS makes the case in its submission that learning that takes place in community education settings is an ideal setting in which to develop generic skills

community education in the delivery of the National Skills Strategy which is a key priority for government. The Strategy targets for 2020 include supporting 70,000 people to progress from Levels 1 & 2 on the NFQ to Level 3 and 260,000 to levels 4 and 5. It also highlights enhancing generic skills in the population including literacy and numeracy, the ability to work autonomously, be self managing, think creatively, work as part of a team and adapt to change. AONTAS makes the case in its submission that learning that takes place in community education settings is learner-centred involving both group process and supported independent learning, and is therefore an ideal setting in which to develop generic skills, especially for those with lower levels of formal education. Much of the provision is targeted at people at Levels 1 through to 3 on the NFQ but many community groups offer options at higher levels as well. More information about this will be available when a complementary piece of community education research conducted with members of the Community Education Network will be completed by August 2011. The findings of this and our previous research will feed into a national seminar on community education in the Autumn.

Working collaboratively

Promoting the value of adult and community education and strengthening its voice and visibility is crucial to the survival of the sector at this moment in time. We believe that collaborative work is the key and that we are 'better together'. In order to strengthen advocacy AONTAS has developed a working partnership with the National Adult Literacy Agency to identify common agendas and establish ways of working together to promote these using our respective strengths. Both organisations have launched three year strategic plans to take our work through from 2011 until 2013. A joint policy/



Adult Learners' Forum meeting October 2010

We believe that collaborative work is the key and that we are 'better together'

promotion working group has been established which will meet four times per year. The group has already met twice and has agreed terms of reference and identified possible areas for collaboration. Complementary to this work NALA and AONTAS are also currently involved in the 'Collaborate to Innovate' project sponsored through the Wheel, giving us an opportunity to explore the longer term direction of the two organisations.

A level playing field

AONTAS recognises that the adult and community education sector is facing unprecedented challenges but we believe it is both resilient and resourceful. There is no doubt that it is making a real contribution not just to the targets set out in the NSS but also to the priorities laid down by government for social inclusion. However it could do so much more effectively with greater recognition and resources. In the targeting of resources government should look to the track record and capacity of the sector to deliver a quality, holistic and integrated service to adult learners. Of key importance is that the sector is placed on a par with other sectors of the educational system to enable it to fulfill its potential as a key and equal part of the lifelong learning spectrum. AONTAS will be using all of its experience and expertise over the next three years to achieve that goal.

A Recipe for Change

By Elena Gamble, Project Officer with 'Students Learning With Communities' from DIT Community Links. In this article, Elena Gamble considers the potential for community based learning through greater collaboration between the community and voluntary sector and third level education.

This is a good news education recipe, whipped up with some intelligent ingredients, which directly responds to the Taskforce on Active Citizenship's vision for citizenship initiatives across the Higher Education sector and the recent National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030.

A Recipe for Change has one special ingredient which, though grown successfully internationally for the last 40 years, is relatively new to Ireland. This special ingredient, called community-based learning/research (or service-learning), is where students use their specialist subject skills on course-based, credit-bearing, collaborative projects with community partners, for mutual benefit. It has been tried, tested and very much embraced and we hope you will enjoy it.

To begin take a large bowl and in it place:

1. **One small country facing unprecedented economic, social, political times;**
2. **One very big need to support the development of socially responsible citizens with relevant experience and skills to meet these challenges;**
3. **One concentrated dose of community-based learning and community-based research teaching and learning strategies across the higher education sector in Ireland;**
4. **All Higher Educational Institutions;**
5. **As many Community and Voluntary Organisations as you can find, as well as civil society organisations, NGOs, not-for-profit organisations, and disadvantaged local community groups.**



Elena Gamble, DIT

6. Season to taste with appropriate links with industry.

Firmly mix your ingredients until they turn into an inspiring blend of local, national and international collaborations. Place this mix in a baking tray and cook in third level institution ovens at relatively low cost. The result – third level students and the community sector (with support from industry) working together to address the challenges facing society, locally and globally.

The Programme for Students Learning With Communities in the Dublin Institute of Technology was set up especially to cook up this concentrated dose of community-based learning/research (CBL/CBR). In the first two years of the programme 900 students on average each year have been well fed using this recipe.

An example of a perfectly baked recipe for change:

- Home-Start Ireland is a voluntary organisation set up to support families with young children. In 2008 to celebrate its 21st birthday, Home-Start staff, families and volunteers collaborated with a dedicated DIT lecturer, 39 3rd year BA Early Childhood Education students, one fourth year BA Journalism student and a MA in Professional Design Practice student to write, edit, and design a publication *Tea and Friends*, documenting the experiences of mothers, fathers and volunteers involved in Home-Start over the years.
- At the launch of *Tea and Friends*, DIT students shared how much they enjoyed this innovative learning experience and developed a greater appreciation of Home-Start's work. They also developed skills in research and interviewing techniques, gained confidence, and learnt to be flexible and adaptable in communication as they encountered families of different cultures and backgrounds.
- In turn, Home-Start received a beautiful publication to celebrate its birthday, which enables it to communicate more effectively the rich and meaningful work it carries out. Home-Start's work also became better known to a large body of Early Childhood Education students, important work which will remain with these students as they move into their professional careers.
- In a follow-on article written by Tony Bates (founder director of Headstrong – the National Centre for Youth Mental Health), in the Irish Times (2009), he said '*Tea and Friends* reminds us all of what it means to feel like you are a part of a community'.
- CBL projects like *Tea and Friends* benefit students, who develop 'a deeper understanding of course material, a better understanding of the complex problems people face, and an ability to apply course material to new situations and real

world problems' (Hurd, 2008). Students develop a range of key transferable professional skills (increasingly a requirement of many Irish and international professional accreditation bodies) alongside their technical skills, while having the opportunity to gain insight into disadvantaged communities. The community can also benefit from the tangible end products delivered by the students, and from the long-term opportunity to influence higher education agendas through collaboration with students and staff.

- Community-based research (CBR) offers the same benefits, such as through the research that DIT students carry out in collaboration with the LIFELINE project. The LIFELINE is a community-led project based in the Grangegorman area of Dublin's north inner city. Inspired by local resident Kaethe Burt O'Dea, the project involves piloting new ways of inner-city living and well-being, particularly through exploring the transitional use of the disused railway line in the area. Research themes for this project include preventative healthcare strategies, urban agriculture, industrial ecology, zero waste, biodiversity and eco-literacy. To date DIT students in chemistry, spatial planning, sustainable development, and architecture, both at undergraduate and post-graduate level, have been involved in contributing to this research.
- Ultimately our recipe for change aims to energise all participants to work for social change. The recently launched National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 recommends that service-learning be expanded across a wide range of higher education programmes in Ireland, and provided that resources are delivered to back it up, then the scope for cooking up this recipe and effecting change will be maximised nationally. In this instance DIT's Programme for Students Learning With Communities, resourced effectively, can share its expertise, from its well stocked larder of experience.

See www.communitylinks.ie.

Seeing STARS

A certified car maintenance training programme which is successfully engaging young unemployed men in rural Co. Clare. A group of women on the Island of Inis Oir who are turning a love of quilting into a small enterprise. An initiative in Northern Ireland which trains older people in providing information to older people. A set of DVD resources designed to support adult education tutors. And a library which is now a place of learning for people from 124 different countries. These are just some of the initiatives showcased in this year's STAR Awards for Adult Learning Projects.

The STAR Awards Ceremony certainly opened this year's Festival on a high note. Almost 200 representatives of groups shortlisted in nine different categories gathered to celebrate their outstanding achievements. One of the strong themes which emerged through the projects nominated was the role of adult learning in meeting the challenges of recession. This manifested itself in a variety of ways – from projects which provide upskilling and retraining opportunities, to those which have a strong social change and anti poverty focus, to those which are developed to respond to the learning needs of the most marginalised groups in Irish society.

Adult learning - 'a citizenship issue'

Michael D. Higgins, keynote speaker at the Awards ceremony said "enhancing adult learning, resourcing it, and structuring it in such a way as to meet the needs of people of all ages, is above all else, a citizenship issue. Those who have been shortlisted for the AONTAS STAR awards from different regions and in different categories, provide a service that is of the greatest sig-

nificance, integrating as it does the moral right of the person to fully develop throughout one's whole life, and the achievement of this through participation with others in the community."

On his final official engagement as Minister for Lifelong Learning, Sean Haughey TD said "It is only with well developed key competencies and core skills, such as team-working, literacy, IT and communications that learners will be able to innovate and create. The Festival has gone from strength to strength and has actively encouraged the lifelong learning spirit resulting in increased numbers enrolling in courses across the country."

The STAR Awards recognise outstanding, learner centred adult and community education projects which demonstrate high levels of collaboration amongst participant groups. The learning involved has included learning for personal fulfilment, social change, active citizenship, skills development, community development and other related fields. The awards have highlighted and supported the collaborative learning approach which is vital to developing healthy and vibrant communities.



Michael D. Higgins, keynote speaker at the ceremony

A stellar judging panel

Special thanks to the STAR Awards Judging Panel for their dedication and time spent on the judging process. The judging panel comprises three different panels of five judges. Judges this year included: Ann Devlin (FETAC), Kevin Hurley (adult learner), Vivienne Glanville (adult learner), Liam Bane (former AEO), Eithne ni Dhonnchadha (AEOA), Ted Fleming (NUI Maynooth), Frank Vaughan (ICTU), Helen Keogh (National Co-ordinator, VTOS) Bernie McDonnell (Pobal), Maureen Kavanagh (Active Retirement Ireland), Donal Walsh (City of Galway VEC), Sarah McNerney (FÁS), Avine McNally (Small Firms Association), Richard Thorn (Bluebrick) and Claire Byrne (NQAI).



Learners from the ABL Project – winners in the Projects in Progress Category

This year, the winners are...

Connaught

Winner: Mná le Cheile

Mná le Cheile was formed in 2006 with the aim of creating a social outlet for its members, promoting traditional hand-crafts and developing an enterprise centre to market their craft. It also has an intergenerational aspect by including school age children and older learners in the project.

Highly Commended: Men making the mould (Co. Mayo VEC)

Ulster

Winner: Advantage Training -accredited training on age issues

The Advantage adult learning course is aimed at those who work in an advisory capacity with older people by allowing them to develop their knowledge, skills and experiences in areas that they may be less

knowledgeable about while giving a holistic view of the issues facing older people.

Highly Commended: Mevagh green gardening project (Mevagh Resource Centre)

Munster

Winner: OBAIR, Newmarket Car Maintenance Project

OBAIR Newmarket Car Maintenance Project aims to encourage local youths back to formal education and to provide meaningful occupation for them by engaging them through learning or through community involvement.

Highly Commended: Ballincollig Adult Basic Education Service

Leinster

Winner: Longford Women's Link

Longford Women's Link is a local, not-for-profit women's resource centre, established in 1995 in order to provide new opportunities for Co.

Longford women. It is committed to effecting social change and challenging gender inequality.

Highly Commended: Blokes with Cameras (South West Wexford Community Development Project)

Dublin

Winner: Service User Involvement – SUI

The aim of the Soilse Service User Involvement is to consult participants about their needs and vision for the programme and to define their issues of concern. Participants in Soilse all come from a drug addiction background, having experienced extreme forms of social exclusion, manifest by homelessness, criminal records, early school leaving, no work history, family breakdown and poor life expectancy.

Highly Commended: RADE LTD (Recovery through Art, Drama and Education)



Representatives from the Open Learning Centre in the Central Library, winners in the Workplace Learning Category

Nationwide

Winner: Partnership Education Initiative in Drug Prevention Education and Research Capacity

The School of Applied Social Science in UCD offers two specific diploma programmes which have been designed to provide access to university-level courses where this doesn't exist, and to give practical expression to the strong community focus that professional practice and service delivery in this field requires.

Highly Commended: Congress Centres Network

Once Off Initiatives

Winner: 'Bridging the Gap'

'Bridging the Gap' aims to make the perspectives of the top academics and activists accessible to all by developing a user-friendly, effective, visual resource to support the Adult and Community

Education sector. It will do this by bringing the theoretical and practical perspectives of the leading academics and activists to adult learners. This educational resource "Bridging the Gap" will be this consciousness raising tool and will be a catalyst to positive social change.

Highly Commended: ATLAS Women's Centre

Projects in Progress

Winner: Adult Better Learning & Education (ABLE) 18-21 Programme

The Adult Better Learning & Education (ABLE) 18-21 programme is an initiative aimed at encouraging and supporting young people in returning to education and training in the Tolka Area Partnership. This is achieved through the provision of a FETAC 4 General Vocational Skills Award which offers participants the opportunity to gain a Leaving Cert equivalent award

whilst exploring their interests and progression opportunities in further education.

Highly Commended: Dodder Valley English Language Project

Workplace Learning Award

Winner: Open Learning Centre

Established in 1986 as part of the Central Library, The Open Learning Centre is a unique learning facility offering access to all regardless, of age, social status or ethnicity. It constitutes a unique, safe, organic learning environment, where people from 124 countries come to learn together. Courses are self learning, so students can learn at their own pace.

Highly Commended: : Speedpak WAM Training Programme

More information about the Award winners is available from www.adultlearnersfestival.com.

The OBAIR Car Maintenance Project

In this article, Niamh Farren chats to Siobhan O Driscoll, Development Officer with OBAIR Newmarket, about the Car Maintenance Project, winner of the Munster STAR Award.



Joe McConigle, tutor on the OBAIR Car Maintenance Project

This is a story of our times and how a small community took on the challenge of rising unemployment, by working together. Newmarket is a small rural village in Co. Clare with a population of less than 2000 people. Like many other communities in Ireland, Newmarket has been devastated by unemployment. The decline of traditional employers such as the construction sector has particularly affected young men living in the area. The local development organisation OBAIR in Newmarket identified a particular group of young men in the community between the ages of 18-24 who were unemployed but who were impossible to engage in education and training already run at the centre. One day, Siobhan O Driscoll, the development worker from OBAIR, approached a group of youths

tinkering at cars in a local estate and asked them what their ideal career choice was. 'The answer was unanimous 'she explained. 'Anything to do with cars, motorbikes or engines. I finally realised that maybe this interest was the key to getting this particular group back into some form of education and training.'

Creative fundraising

Times have changed and community groups don't have access to the same levels of funding that they had in previous years. Siobhan had to get creative about how she was going to respond to this need with little or no funding. She first approached the local VEC in Co. Clare, who agreed to provide tutor hours through the delivery of a FETAC certified train-

Twelve young men started the car maintenance project with eight men completing the project and six receiving distinctions.

ing course in vehicle maintenance and theory. She also approached a local garage owner who had ceased training in the downturn, who 'loaned' his premises and tools to the group one afternoon a week. 'OBAIR also supported the group to meet regularly, and helped them to fundraise' explained Siobhan. 'In the summer of 2010 the group was given a motorbike that was ready for scrappage. Through some fundraising activities the group was able to purchase the tools and parts they needed to restore the bike. The group has now completed their FETAC Level 5 course in vehicle maintenance, and while doing that they have restored the motorbike. They meet regularly, so there is a social side to their learning, and are already planning on developing their skills by working on more vehicles,' she explains. Twelve young men started the car maintenance project with eight men completing the project and six receiving distinctions. The young men were all early school leavers some had previously worked in the building trade as plasterers and labourers with three of them never having worked since they left school. So, this was a huge achievement for them personally.

Although he is currently unemployed he is one step closer to pursuing his future as a mechanic.

Kale's story

One of the young men who participated in the course was 24 year old Kale. Kale studied until his Leaving Certificate but due to lack of confidence didn't actually sit the exams and left school at 17. He picked

up some part time work in local hotels and restaurants until he was nineteen and got his first full time job in a quarry. At 21 years of age he took up what he thought was an apprenticeship with a car mechanic in Ennis. In fact, the garage owner was not certified, and as the downturn kicked in, Kale found himself redundant and with no qualifications for the time he had invested. Living in Newmarket there were no opportunities for him to pursue his education and training in car maintenance, and his confidence hit rock bottom. Local garage owners were reluctant to take him on as a trainee mechanic because the economic situation was so unstable.

It is vital that they are able to progress through FÁS or to gain an apprenticeship.

Kale was one of the twelve young men who graduated from the 'Car Maintenance' programme and gained a distinction. Although he is currently unemployed, he is one step closer to pursuing his future as a mechanic. Gaining a qualification has boosted his confidence along with his future employment prospects.

If they hadn't had the opportunity of doing this course, this particular group would most likely be facing a future of unemployment. OBAIR and Clare VEC knew they had hit on a winner when the learners came in the first day for their first two hour class and were there three and a half hours later. Because of the course they have developed confidence and they have a sense of achievement. This is crucial in them moving onto further education and employment. However, she cautions that the course is only the beginning for the young men. 'Progression is crucial. It is vital that they are able to progress through FÁS or to gain an apprenticeship. This is difficult in the current climate. The closest FÁS course to Newmarket is based in Co. Cork.

For more information about the OBAIR Car Maintenance Project, contact OBAIR, www.obair.org.

'Giving older people the Advantage!'

The Ulster STAR this year is a unique training initiative targeting older people in the community. 'Advantage Training' in Northern Ireland started out as the Older Person Advisory Course in August 2008. Niamh Farren spoke to Emma Murphy, Head of Training at Advice NI.



Representatives from the Advantage Training Project receiving their award

Training needs

'We wanted to improve the quality and quantity of advice provision to older people in Northern Ireland so that they were more aware of their rights and entitlements' explained Emma Murphy, Head of Training at Advice Northern Ireland. Advice NI carried out an extensive consultation process throughout the age sector, which identified a need for training in issues associated with older people's rights and entitlements. A steering committee was then set up, including representation from Advice Northern Ireland,

Age NI and Access to Benefits. 'We wanted to ensure a partnership approach to responding to this training need' said Emma. 'Working with other organisations was seen as vital in ensuring quality, sustainability and marketing of this initiative.' Other subject experts also contributed to the course to ensure that the content was factually correct, up to date and relevant. These experts included those in the Pension Service NI, the Law Centre in NI and Belfast City Council.

A pilot training course was developed on the basis of information

from the consultation process. Following the pilot some changes were made—for example, new information on older people and debt was included. In addition, changes were made to how the course was structured. 'Learners told us that they wanted to be able to take individual modules or choose their own combinations of modules, rather than having to take the full twelve week course', explained Emma. 'Learners now have the option of taking the full course of six modules, or gaining accreditation for individual modules.'



There is a strong group-work philosophy during the course

The target group for the training course was those involved in the delivery of information to older people, to help expand their skills and knowledge base in areas such as policy, legislation, good practice and general professional development. The course is accredited with the Open College Network Northern Ireland at Level 3, and includes six modules:

- Age awareness and working with older people
- Introduction to older peoples benefits
- Understanding the State Retirement Pension
- Health rights and services for older people
- Community care and older people
- Housing and older people

There are no entry requirements to the course, so learners who have fewer qualifications but vast experience are encouraged to participate and gain accreditation. So far, one hundred learners have completed one or more modules, with eighty of them receiving accreditation. Charlie is one of the people who have successfully completed the

course. 'I really didn't think I could at my age (71 at the time) achieve a pass on a course like the level that course was set at. Although I had a good education, most of my schooling had been done a long time ago. Over the last few years I have become very involved within the Oaklee setup (residents association) and I really do spend a great deal of time working for the benefit of Oaklee tenants. The result of myself (and Pat) passing the course is really good news for our Tenant participation process. We intend to offer advice around the Oaklee (56) schemes if requested and we hope this will be a positive step in advice giving to older people. When I realised how much was required to complete the course, I really didn't think I could do it. Too much time needed, but more importantly it was just such a long time since I had undertaken such an intensive learning programme. I had my doubts during the course, I nearly gave up on a number of occasions. I am now really pleased, and somewhat surprised, that I did in fact complete the course.'

The methodologies involved in delivering the course have been

developed to cater to a range of learning styles. These include visual, kinaesthetic, and aural techniques. There is a strong groupwork philosophy and classes include plenty of time for interaction and sharing experiences. Learning is as much as possible based on solving real-life problems and giving learners the opportunity to apply learning in a real situation (such as using the A2B Benefits Calculator Tool) A range of assessment techniques such as case studies, and research projects are used to accommodate different learning styles.

Future plans

Plans for the future development of the course involve an e-learning element. Advice NI is working closely with Synergy Learning to further develop this aspect of the course. A second objective is to explore routes for University accreditation with the possibility of increasing the level of the course and its modules to level 4/5. Emma says 'We can tell that there is great interest in the course from the numbers of people signing up. We are delighted with the high levels of retention and course completion. By working together, organisations in the age sector in Northern Ireland have developed a course that is highly relevant, particularly at a time when people may be worried or stressed about their finances. We also hope that it goes some way to recognising the valuable work carried out by advisors.'

For more information about Advantage Training, visit www.adviceni.net.

Festival around the country

This year was the biggest ever Adult Learners' Festival, with over 400 events taking place around the country. Twenty five counties were represented, and AONTAS estimates given information from event organisers that approximately forty seven thousand people attended festival events throughout the country. Here's a flavour of the activities which took place from those who organised events.

A snapshot of events

There were cookery classes in Clare and Timber Measurement courses in Cork. In Cavan, people could try Irish for Beginners while in Carlow people learned how to dress for interviews. In County Donegal there were opportunities to try the FÁS e-learning programme at the library. In Dublin there was something for all tastes and needs – from scrabble sessions, to talks about managing your money, to opportunities in the green economy. There were coffee mornings in Galway, and taster sessions on Skype and Facebook in Kerry. There was a viewing of the 'Quiet Man' in Laois, while in Leitrim there were displays of stories from adult learners. In Longford, women met with their local election candidates and learned more about their policies. In Louth, an Grianán showcased a variety of learning activities – from cookery to keeping fit. In Mayo the focus was on green learning, with advice on organic gardening and herb production. There was an artisan food sampling day in Meath, and in Monaghan, local writer Darach McDonald dropped into Clones Library to talk about his new book. In Co. Offaly, Edenderry library organised a tour for people returning to education. There was



A Timber Measurement Course in Ballydesmond Co. Cork, as part of the Teagasc Forestry Development Department contribution to the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival 2011. Picture includes members of the Duhallow Forest Owners Group.

a coffee morning in Roscommon for adult learners, and an event promoting AONTAS in Co. Sligo. South Tipperary VEC showcased a range of adult education opportunities including dog grooming and jewellery making, which was featured on RTE's Winning Streak programme. There was huge involvement from libraries throughout Tipperary, who promoted adult learning through their Quick Reads and exhibitions featuring learners work. Waterford showcased the work accomplished by a group of 13 unemployed men since last November in turning a greenfield site into an organic food

production facility. Wexford saw the launch of a new resource DVD for those involved in adult education called 'Bridging the Gap'. In Wicklow, the Glendalough Visitor Centre allowed free admission for the duration of the Festival.

The Open Day was a wonderful success as it raised the profile of our Centre and provided an opportunity to extend the message of lifelong learning – it's never too late to learn.



Green Learning at Mallow Return to Education Centre



Exhibiting Learners work at Clonmel Library

Munster

Celebrations at Mallow Return to Education Centre

By Eilish Roche, Adult Literacy Organiser, Mallow Return to Education Centre

AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival was celebrated in style in Mallow Return to Education Centre. North Cork BTEI and Adult Literacy have their headquarters in Mallow Return to Education Centre and we were joined by learners and tutors from across North Cork, including Mitchelstown, Charleville, Millstreet, Kanturk and Newmarket.

Organic Horticulture and Sustainable Living were showcased at the entrance to the centre. Dr Shirley Gallagher from Greenworks, along with a number of Horticulture learners, volunteered their expertise and visitors were encouraged to see at first hand samples of 'before and after' composting processes. The public was briefed on the importance of composting and its benefits to the environment.

On entering the Centre, Family Learning, Childcare and Healthcare programmes were featured and tutors were available to advise on programmes and progression routes. Assistive Technology (AT) and Distance Learning opportunities were demonstrated in our Information Technology room, highlighting advances in technology and opportunities for part-time adult learners.

Another room in the centre was dedicated to showcasing learners' art work. Artists and budding artists alike availed of the opportunity to share techniques and swap experiences. Different media included sculpture and painting.

Entertainment was provided by young musicians from the local Gaelscoil Daivis and our local Seanachai, Billy Barry, took us back in time to the 'Ireland of the squinty windows' with fantastic tales and hilarious yarns to lift the spirits.

If relaxation was your thing, Dolores Daly, a tutor in the centre,

administered aromatherapy hand massages throughout the morning. Refreshments were available and visitors were encouraged to sit back, enjoy the atmosphere and have a chat.

The Adult Literacy Student Committee were the organisers of this highly successful event and they saw in it an opportunity to fund-raise for the local St Vincent de Paul Society. Each member of the Committee visited local shops and businesses to request sponsorship, resulting in a wide range of gifts and vouchers which were raffled on the day. They also organised a 'Bring and Buy' Cake Sale which proved enormously successful. Between the raffle and the cake sale a total of €420 was raised for the local charity.

The Open Day was a wonderful success as it raised the profile of our Centre and provided an opportunity to extend the message of lifelong learning – it's never too late to learn. We are already enthusiastically planning towards next year's event.



Brazilian students at their display table at Kerry International Language Academy



Festival at Waterford Access IT: Tutor – Catherine Walshe, Students – Michelle Cullinane, Elizabeth Kavanagh, Susan Gallagher with the Mayor of Waterford Mary Roche and Event Organiser Maeve Maloney

Limerick Learners' Market

By Suzanne Kyle, Limerick Community Education Network

On Wednesday, 23rd February, to mark "Learning Communities" Day the LCEN held a "Learner Market". The market was aimed at adult learners and those thinking of returning to learning and took place in Daghda Dance Space in Limerick city. The Learner Market was launched by the Mayor, Cllr Maria Byrne, who spoke of the success of communities working together to promote Adult Community Education in Limerick City. It showcased the work of adult learners who have participated in community education classes in their local communities during the past year. The Learner Market also hosted workshops on a number of different adult education opportunities including motor mechanics, woodwork, hair care, nails & beauty, pilates and jewellery making. These were facilitated by tutors and adult learners.

The LCEN ran a story telling competition for learners across the city,

the theme being "childhood", and the winners were announced at the Learner Market.

The second event organised by the LCEN was exhibition of art by adult learners across the city. This was launched in Watch House Cross Community Library and ran throughout the week of the festival.

Learning Tree blossoms in Limerick IT

By Dawn Coleman

In advance of the Adult Learners' Festival, Limerick Institute of Technology hosted a coffee morning for prospective adult learners on Wednesday 16th February. LIT invited students from a number of local PLC Colleges and Adult Education Facilities to attend this event in order to meet and greet our current mature learners.

On Monday 21st February 2011, Limerick Institute of Technology re-launched its Learning Tree in our Moylish Park Campus. This was the second year that the

Learning Tree had been on display for Adult Learners' Festival, having been launched for the first time in 2010. The idea was the same. Adult learners studying at LIT (Mature full time, part time and Lifelong Learning students) were invited to participate by reflecting on their experience as an adult learner and then writing out a statement, in relation to how this experience has affected their lives, on a 'leaf' and placing it on the learning tree. This year the learning tree was, appropriately, launched by a mature learner of LIT. The tree was prominently displayed and available for students throughout the week. In 2011 there were, again, many interesting and thought-provoking comments placed on the tree over the week which included:

- Learning is essential to develop, understand and grow, both mentally and emotionally. It gives you the tools to grow, embrace and celebrate all life's challenges and opportunities. It's never too late to learn. (Ann, 48)



The Learning Tree at LIT

- Learning is a chance to meet others and learn from their experiences. It gives me the confidence to progress in my career. (Michelle, 38)
- Better opportunities and self-development, a prosperous future.
- It secures my future!

Access IT hosts awards ceremony and open night

By Karen McCarthy, Access IT Ltd

Over 100 people attended Access IT Ltd's Awards Ceremony and Open Night. The Mayor of Waterford, Mary Roche honoured us by attending to award students with their certificate. The event was a great success.

Access IT Ltd is a non-profit, community based Information Technology training centre located in Waterford City. We are an accredited ECDL and City & Guilds Training and Test Centre and are currently funded under

the National Development Plan. Access IT Ltd. offers their clients the opportunity to participate in a wide range of accredited and non-accredited training in the use of Computers. We work from a community development ethos, supporting people to identify their own training needs, encouraging them to recognise their own abilities, and empowering them to develop responses to their needs while learning at their own pace.

Intercultural learning in Kerry

By the Kerry International Language Academy

Kerry International Language Academy in conjunction with the Citizens Advice Bureau in Killarney held a coffee morning to celebrate the Adult Learners' Festival on Thursday February 25th 2011. This event was open to members of the public. The attendance was over 25 people. The theme of the event was to celebrate the different cultures of the students in Kerry International Language Academy.



Information Stand at South Tipperary VEC

Students from Brazil, Pakistan, Mauritius, South Africa and China all set up display tables showing off different aspects of their culture. There was a great sample of various culinary delights on offer from the different countries such as Chinese spring rolls, Mauritius jalebi and gateau patate which the attendees all sampled. In addition students had photos and other materials on display to help tell the story behind their country's culture. Sally Filby, Manager of the Academy stated "The students, staff and members of the public greatly benefited from the event as it highlighted the diversity that exists in Irish society and also the need for everyone to respect and understand each other's culture. It was evident that the students thoroughly enjoyed the event and it created a great buzz of excitement among them during the week as they prepared for this event. It is certainly something we would like to get involved in again next year."



Craftswomen Anne Fenelon & Christine Banville at the CTEC Wexford Exhibition

Leinster

Dublin City Libraries – learning on the road!

By Anne Gannon, Dublin City Library

The Library Learning Bus parked in the carpark of the Social Welfare Local Office on the Navan Road. We used the opportunity to approach people and explain how libraries can assist adult learners. We highlighted courses like Websmart (the library basic computer skills programme) and WriteOn4Work (NALA's distance learning website) and offered demonstrations on the Bus. We engaged people in conversation and altogether had seventeen individual conversations about libraries and learning – among other things! We gave each person a 'pack' made up of; 1 Library Access leaflet, 1 'people think libraries are grey' leaflet, 1 Spring Brochure, 1 Adult joining form and 1 Child joining form and also 1 flyer about the WriteOn distance learning programme. We

also gave out the Adult Learners' Festival branded pens and fridge magnets.

Thursday is not a busy day at this Social Welfare Office so the numbers were small, but the conversations were worthwhile. Here are a few examples of what transpired:

- One woman was a part time worker whose only child was finished 3rd level and was now 'signing on' and planning to emigrate. She is planning to return to education to help with the loneliness.
- One man has just recently signed up for a SIPTU return to education programme where he works part time and is very excited at the thoughts of starting back learning. He also took a WriteOn4Work flyer for a friend who is unemployed.
- One young woman was very interested in the distance education aspect of WriteOn and came on the Bus to try it out. She completed the assessment section of the Digital Media module and seems keen to register. She also didn't



Laois VEC 'Speak the Language' Campaign

know that libraries had free Wi-Fi so she went straight in to Cabra Library to start using it.

In general, the people we met and spoke with were frustrated and sad, but trying hard to keep hope alive and all came across as full of integrity and even retained a sense of humour. A small drawback of the timing of this visit – as it was the day before the General Election 2011, most people assumed at first that we were canvassing, and gave us a wide berth! However, the presence of the Learning Bus, the posters we had dotted around the building (inside and out) and our offered explanations helped dispel that thought. The sunny day also allowed people to spend time talking and probably helped the overall mood of everyone – ourselves included!

From film screenings to speaking the language!

By Sandra Doyle, Co. Laois VEC

Inspired by the nationwide campaign that was launched in Germany to motivate immigrants



Laois VEC viewing of the *Quiet man*



Carlow Youthreach Green Learning event

to learn German our English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students at the Adult Learning Centre, Co. Laois VEC decided to launch a campaign in Ireland. The 'Speak the Language' campaign encourages people from ethnic minority communities in Ireland to learn English and students began promoting this campaign during the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival. Constant feedback from ESOL students at our centre indicates that learning English is the first and most fundamental step towards involvement in their local communities and towards full and equal participation in Irish society. It was for this very reason that students themselves chose to initiate this campaign.

Supported by Nurcan Cetin-Birgin who is on internship from Germany and whose parents were Turkish immigrants in Germany the students started creating their posters. All ESOL students were invited to participate and the creative process involved face paint

using the colours of the Irish flag. Eyebrows, tongues, cheeks and lips were painted. The tricolour represents the link to Ireland, the country where immigrants are now living, where their children are attending school and for most of them where they plan to stay. A series of photos were taken and the two most dramatic photos were chosen for the campaign. Many captions for the photos were discussed including 'Learn the Lingo' and 'Find your voice' but the final captions chosen were 'Open your eyes to Ireland – Speak the Language' and 'Don't Live in the Shade – Speak the Language.' Captions were chosen to reflect what was happening in each particular photograph. The photos were emailed to all agencies / support services inviting them to get involved in this campaign and support it.

On Thursday 24th February 2011 a group of 56 adult learners from the Adult Learning Centre, Co. Laois VEC participated in a viewing of the film 'The Quiet Man'. Irish and

international students were invited to attend. Students met at the Dunamiase Theatre, Portlaoise and really enjoyed watching the movie. After the film all participants were offered the opportunity to discuss the film and enjoy some tea, coffee and biscuits.

Carlow Youthreach Green Learning Day

By Una Hayes, Carlow Youthreach VEC

The group from Carlow Youthreach decided to tackle the issue of litter and waste within their community under the theme 'Green Learning' during the Adult Learners' Festival. Their project aimed to raise awareness of Carlow's recent "Tidiest Town" award from a whole community point of view. The aim of the project was for students to reflect on the award and decide whether they thought it was a deserved one or if it only reflected certain areas of Carlow. Students had to pick areas which they believed 'won' Carlow the award and areas which need to



Service Users speak out at a Simon event



TARGET Green Learning event in Donaghmede

be improved. They wanted to compare the two and show the community the differences. They created a scrapbook, DVD and wall-hanging to raise awareness on the issue of litter and waste in Carlow. They also carried out a lot of action within their Youthreach centre including clearing up the Youthreach yard, carrying out a litter pick and creating a garden by planting bulbs.

Learning about Homelessness in Dublin

By Eimear O'Neill, Simon Dublin Learning and Development Officer

This year, Dublin's Simon marked the Festival at their launch of a book – a few days before the Festival began. Over a hundred people attended the Irish Writers' Centre for

It was evident that the students thoroughly enjoyed the event and it created a great buzz of excitement among them during the week

the launch of "Scrappy but Happy" – A Collection of Artwork and Creative Writing from their Homeless Services. The renowned writer, Roddy Doyle opened the launch giving a wonderfully inspiring speech. Some of the book contributors read their individual pieces which were in turn met by enthusiastic rounds of applause. The four pieces combined humour and intrigue, giving a flavour of the book. The artwork from the book was also on display and people were invited to browse the collection as they enjoyed the light refreshments which were provided and sponsored by With Taste Ireland. The Irish Writers' Centre also kindly sponsored the venue.

The book arose out of a series of Creative Writing classes that Dublin Simon delivered to service users, to promote engagement and give an opportunity for self-expression. The Creative Writing classes centred around the "Free Speech" method, which allows participants to find their individual styles by writing from their own experience, per-

spective and language. There was initial reluctance, uncertainty and anxiety among participants, soon followed by interest, enthusiasm and enjoyment as they began to acknowledge their own and others' hidden talents. During workshops, the writers supported each other through applause after readings, and through listening with earnest and mutual respect. As one participant declared, "I didn't know learning could be fun." The idea to collate participants' written work into a book gradually evolved to include other forms of expression, in particular artwork, reflecting the diversity of the service users of Dublin Simon. Most of the artwork included here – drawings, sketches, paintings – was already on display within our services, and we wished to equally acknowledge the imagination of these artists, some of whom are anonymous. The writing in "Scrappy but Happy" is poignant and gritty, joyful and funny and, as the title suggests, ever hopeful and resilient.

A great variety of people attended the book launch coming from various background including current and former Dublin Simon service users, Dublin Simon staff, volunteers and board members and, representatives and service users from other agencies in the homeless, drugs and adult education sectors. The book launch was a tremendous success with everyone thoroughly enjoying themselves and delighted with the book. Particular thanks should be paid to the book contributors, without whom “Scrappy but Happy” would not have been possible.

Service User Speak Out

By Eimear O Neill, Dublin Simon

On 3 March, 62 past and present service users, staff and volunteers attended Exchange Dublin Temple Bar for the second Dublin Simon Service User ‘Speak Out’. There was a diverse group at the event with representation from most Dublin Simon services. A Speak Out is “a way for people to communicate with and influence people and organisations that make decisions that affect their lives.” Service users submitted their topics for discussion. Some of the issues discussed included

- poor communication and attitude of Social Welfare Officers when dealing with homeless people
- poor standard of private rented accommodation
- a safe place (drop-in centre or coffee shop) for people to go dur-

ing the day including weekends and Bank Holidays

- the issue of intimidation in some homeless services, and
- the social anxiety that many homeless people experience.

The Director of the Homeless Agency Cathal Morgan spoke about the reconfiguration of Homeless Services and the progress made so far. The lively discussion came to an end almost 2 hours later, followed by food sponsored by Zaytoon, music and a raffle. The evening was a great success and everyone had a good time.

Learning to go green in Donaghmede

By Heidi Bedell, TARGET, Donaghmede

TARGET's fourth Adult Learner's Festival Event took place on Tuesday 22nd February – The day to learn about the environment. Inspired by the AONTAS link for 'Leftoverchef' the theme we had adopted for the day was 'Waste reduction and food reuse.'

We started the day with a free presentation on waste reduction and recipes for using left over food. This included information on composting and recycling. The talk extended in discussions which were continued in the canteen over a free cup of coffee or tea. Next we had the official introduction of the composting system to TARGET. A donation to TARGET of a caddy and composter means that in the future all food waste from TARGET will now be composted. This will

Once again the AONTAS festival provided us with the opportunity to focus on something new and to highlight the services available to Donaghmede for second chance education.

compliment TARGET's new course in organic gardening which started last September and is continuing until June. Next year this will be a FETAC level 3 course.

The banner and AONTAS balloons helped to draw attention to the centre from passers by and many dropped in for a cup of tea and a chat and to explore the services and facilities that TARGET offers.

Once again the AONTAS festival provided us with the opportunity to focus on something new and to highlight the services available to Donaghmede for second chance education. We're all looking forward to next year.

Learning opportunities in Blanchardstown

By Sandra Dunne, Blanchardstown Area Partnership

This was Blanchardstown Area Partnerships first attempt to host an Adult Learners' Festival and, due to the Festival's phenomenal success, we intend to make this an annual event and will be encouraging participation to all organisations in Dublin 15.

The Festival gave people a fantastic opportunity to find out new

information on a range of items from job seeking through laughter yoga to beauty. There were 19 information stands from organisations and agencies in the area, and we were delighted to have the support of celebrities such as Sean Gallagher, Karl Henry and Jane Downes.

We offered workshops and information on health related matters from giving up smoking to Laughter Therapy, and we invited everyone in the community to drop in and avail of all the free services from 10am to 2pm daily. We held a host of demonstrations in Hair, Beauty, Reflexology, Tai Chi and Acupuncture. We gave taster workshops in Zumba Fitness and Yoga Laughter Therapy.

Particularly important to job seekers were workshops in Career Transition, Career Guidance, CV Doctor, Social Media and Learning Styles to mention but a few. Throughout the festival, as well as the information stands, we had information from the Marie Keating Cancer Foundation, the Local Employment Services, Money Advice Bureau, Baptec Computer Training Centre, FÁS, the Department of Social Protection, Local Community Drugs Team, Blanchardstown Institute of Technology and Blanchardstown Community Training Centre. There was lots to hear and see and all was FREE!

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped in making our event so suc-



Learning to keep fit at Blanchardstown Area Partnership

cessful. We also want to thank the AONTAS staff for their support, and of course a special thanks to the Director, Berni Brady, for officially closing the Festival at our closing ceremony on Friday. This included the first viewing of the dvd of the week, which gave a taste of what had taken place during our five day event.

Skills showcase in Wexford

The Community Education Training Centre in Wexford held a successful exhibition showcasing the work of a training programme funded by the Equality for Women measure. The programme is focused on the craft skills which many women living in rural communities already possess, such as Aran and designer knitting, crochet and lace making as well as jewellery making and patchwork. Participants can attain a FETAC Level 6 Train the Trainers qualification through the course. CTEC wanted to engage with local tourist attractions in order to promote the work of the group by organising exhibitions and craft

demonstrations on site. The first of these exhibitions took place at the CTEC Centre in Norse Gate House as part of the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival. Twenty skilled craftswomen from Co. Wexford displayed a wide variety of different crafts, which was set out over three rooms in the CTEC Training Centre. Throughout the day there were continuous demonstrations of crafts including knitting, lace making, jewellery and beading, sewing and garment construction, patchwork, felting, crochet and embroidery.

In addition to viewing the various crafts, visitors could attend craft workshops, try out different crafts and get advice on how to get started with craftwork.

An unforgettable afternoon full of fun and laughter lead to a fantastic celebration – and one we will not forget in a hurry.

Connaught

Learning Tree bears fruits at Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre, St Vincent de Paul

By Maria Flaherty, Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre

A learning tree which symbolises the highs and lows of adult learning was unveiled on Wednesday February 23rd by the association of Estonian Adult Educators Andras. Andras is a European partner on the AONTAS Grundtvig Learning Partnership Project 'Sowing the Learning Seeds.'

Adult Learners at Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre, Society of St Vincent de Paul, decorated the tree with reflections and thoughts on their experience of learning at the centre. "A wonderful "Treasure House" is Croí na Gaillimhe; A choice of classes, new friends and plenty of laughter," read one of the messages on the tree. The Centre also held a free afternoon of mobile phone training for the older members of the community. For the more artistic we had a showing of 2 films from the Sistine Ceiling and Van Gough.

Speaking at the event Loretta Needham, Centre Manager, Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre said "Croí na Gaillimhe Resource Centre is a place where friendships are born and connections are made." She reminded the group present that "Loneliness is an unpleasant feeling in which a person experiences a strong sense of emptiness and solitude resulting from inadequate levels of social relationships."

Several learners from the centre gave a brief account of their learning experiences at Croí na Gaillimhe. They all spoke of the joy and the fun they experienced in learning and most of all, they mentioned the friendships they had made – or in many cases, renewed!

Also on the afternoon music was provided by gifted musicians John Fallon, Padraic Keane and Sean Hughes. They gave a brief demonstration of traditional Irish music and instruments such as the uilleann pipes and fiddle before playing a variety of songs and encouraging all the participants to dance.

While enjoying the display of Irish dancing – and showing great ability! – our guests – agreed to demonstrate a traditional Estonian dance. The dance proved hugely popular with everyone present and an encore was required! An unforgettable afternoon full of full and laughter lead to a fantastic celebration – and one we will not forget in a hurry.

Celebrating adult learners in Leitrim

By Niamh Brennan, Adult Education Guidance Counsellor, Co. Leitrim VEC

To kick off the AONTAS Adult Learners Festival in Leitrim this year, Leitrim VEC Adult Education Services launched a 'Showcase of Adult Learner's Work' in The Dock Arts Centre in Carrick on Shannon. adult education and community groups kindly donated a range of wonderful arts and crafts that they

have made in various courses which they have taken part in. Examples of the work included photography, jewellery, art and drawings, bog oak sculpture to name but a few so a large variety of pieces were on display and open to the general public free of charge for the week. The launch was attended by staff and students of adult education centres and they all seemed to enjoy seeing their work on display as well as the tea and delicious cakes!

Leitrim VEC Adult Education Guidance and Information Service put together story boards of experiences of adults who have returned to various types of learning and we displayed them in all of the county libraries as well as several Adult Education centres around the county. We hoped this would encourage others to get involved and that it's never too late to learn.

Our final event was to have an Adult Education Information morning on the final day of the festival in Tesco's Shopping centre in Carrick on Shannon where the Adult Education Guidance and Information service provided information and advice on adult learning opportunities in the county.

The local paper, The Leitrim Observer, kindly agreed to publish an article about the festival and adult learning opportunities which included photos of our event. We hope this did a little to celebrate achievements of adult learners and to encourage adults to take up new challenges and learning.

Social Networking: Using Facebook to promote adult learning

The use of social media by non profit organisations is becoming more widespread. In this article, Karen McCarthy of Access IT explains how to get started with Facebook.



Facebook – What is it and why use it?

Facebook is a social networking website that puts people in touch with friends and families. It provides a forum for common interests and causes and the means to communicate with organisations and businesses.

Life can be fast-paced and it can be hard to make time for phone calls or nowadays even to write an email! On Facebook people find and communicate with friends and family. People can share information on their wall i.e. a central location for sharing information like a private notice board, they can write emails and use the instant chat feature. People may not want to share the same information with friends and family members so Facebook friend lists can categorise friendships for sharing and communication purposes and customised privacy settings can determine who sees what. As a parent of a teen, it is important that you can check on their online activity or at least know a little about their online world.

Profile/Account

To sign up, a person needs to create a Profile/User Account. These accounts are intended to represent an individual person with friends that share information about their interests. When sending requests

Facebook advises to "Please only send this request if you know him/her personally", the same applies when accepting requests. Accepting someone as a friend means allowing them access to some or all of your information so it is important to consider the friendship quality of that person to categorise them and ensure that the profile does represent an individual person!

Once you have a Facebook account you can join Groups, "like" Pages or get more involved and become the administrator of a Group or Page yourself.

Groups

People can join groups as members in support of common causes or interests. Groups are limited to 5,000 members and can be public, private or secret. They can be created for families, close friends, colleagues working on a project, small clubs and campaigns.

Fan "Like" Page

Businesses and Organisations also use Facebook to promote their service/product and inform communities of their presence. This is another fantastic advantage for people as they can check the special offers available in their local area or area of interest. People can find out about local events or what entertainment is on before going out for the night. Many

cities and towns have set up local Pages where information is shared about anything relevant to that area. When you "like" a Page their posts will appear in your newsfeed, but they won't see your updates.

Pages offer businesses and organisations a unique way to interact with people because they can get and provide feedback. Business and organisations can utilise Facebook pages to promote, sell, get subscribers and take bookings. There are also insights into usage statistics that help to uncover what your fans like most and what marketing strategies are successful.

Facebook is for all ages. In Ireland there are over 1.8 million people on Facebook that is over 40% of the population. Good "netiquette" and social responsibility is key to effective communication online. Facebook should not replace face-to-face communication but it is here to stay.

PROFILE/User Account ⇨ **add Friends (PEOPLE ONLY)**

GROUPS ⇨ **members join to support a common cause or interest.**

FAN PAGE ⇨ **click "like" become a Fan of a Businesses/Organisation.**

If you're on Facebook don't forget that you can 'like' AONTAS and the Adult Learners' Festival fan pages. You can also receive regular AONTAS updates via Twitter.

Inspiring adult learners

This year, the voice of adult learners was a prominent feature in promoting the Festival and AONTAS pre-election campaign. Here are the stories behind the Festival ads.

Gregori, formerly employed in the construction sector and now completing a BA in Social Sciences. Anna, who was persuaded to finish her Leaving Certificate by her school principal. And finally, Rachel, in the prime of her career as a graphic designer, diagnosed with arthritis and forced to make a complete career change, which she has managed successfully through signing up with TARGET, her local adult education centre.

These three stories were central to a new departure for the advertising campaign for the Adult Learners' Festival this year. In promoting adult learning, we felt that the best advocates were learners themselves. We ran a competition through social networking and email, and asked people to tell us how learning as adults had changed their lives.

On the basis of what we received we selected three entries – a difficult task. All three volunteered to give up an afternoon to help us record the ads. Declan Cassidy, filmmaker, met with us to record the ads. After an afternoon of sharing experiences of adult learning, our three learners each focused on a particular message that they wanted to communicate. For Gregori, it was how he managed to turn the recession into an opportunity. For Rachel, it was how she managed to reinvent herself. And for Anna, it was the discovery that as a mature student she brought valuable life experience to the lecture theatre.

Personal to political

Their stories also formed part of a campaign in the lead up to the General Election 2011. 'Raise

your voice for Adult Learning' – AONTAS's campaign, included stories from ten different adult learners. Their stories are still available online at www.aontas.com/information/learnersstories.html.

During our recent strategic planning process, the 'voice' theme emerged as a powerful one. The ad campaign is one way that AONTAS can promote the 'voice' of adult learning. AONTAS will support the voice of adult learners through the development of the National Adult Learners' Forum. The Forum will bring together the experiences of adults across the lifelong learning spectrum – from literacy right through to learning in the 'third age'.

Anna's story

Returning to education in your thirties might seem like a daunting experience but the fact is that it will be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. For me the process of moving from that first certificate level on to diploma, higher diploma and now masters level has been an exhilarating journey, and one I feel has really only begun. Prior to returning to education the concept of lifelong learning had been an alien one to me. I was like many other people, entrenched in the day to day experience of living, and surviving. However I had always harboured the notion that I could have done much better at school had my own particular circumstances been different or had there been other opportunities available to me.

Making the decision to return to education was taken out of my hands and I literally fell into learning while I was out of work due to illness. I needed to do something for myself to assist me in getting better and I felt also that it might contribute to altering people perceptions of those who struggle with depression and mental health issues. After only a short while I came to realise that the way to create positive change within my life was to educate myself. The subsequent learning experience was a revelation and it opened up a whole new world of experiences and opportunities. It has literally been life chang-



Anna Delaney

ing. By taking one small step at a time I have managed to achieve personal goals that I would previously have thought impossible.

The support I received from my local community adult education facilitators, from my UCD lecturers, and from my classmates has been tremendous. I also found that my experiences in life enriched my learning and afforded me a deeper understanding of the world, and of social justice and gender equality issues. What I was unaware of was that throughout my life I had been learning all along even though it was not in a traditional classroom environment, but rather the great big classroom of life. I now look at the world through a different lens and I am able to navigate it in an entirely different manner than previously.

Gregori's story

Having left school aged 15 and now find myself without a job in my forties, this recession has had a silver lining, I am now making use of the time to both up-skill and to expand my own ability using the precious resource of education.



Gregori Meakin

I am now taking Sociology, Linguistics and Equality studies full-time in the UCD arts program.

I am finally heading towards fulfilling a potential that I felt I always have had in me. If I thought I was going to be unique, I was so wrong. I have found a haven of like-minded people from every walk of life all bringing their own different experiences. Though I am gaining from the lectures I receive I am getting as much from my peers' wealth of experience, and contributions. As a body of students, we mature students demonstrate ability and commitment while still experiencing the wonder of discovery and of learning something for the first time.

But many are doing this on very little funding, particularly for those relying on social welfare. With basic allowances and no grants it is difficult but

the reward of learning is what keeps the experience vibrant and rewarding. I am doing it though with the support of my family, my fellow students. AONTAS have been very supportive too. With all this I am hopeful of new beginnings and things to come.

Rachel's story

I spent many years working as a graphic designer. However, at the age of 33 I was diagnosed with arthritis. I had to give up my career and the future wasn't looking very bright. Most people aren't sure what they want to do. I wasn't sure what I would be able to do, given my illness. Going back to education played a big part in helping me get back on my feet.



Rachel Lynch

The local community centre, TARGET Adult Education, were very helpful and supportive. They gave me the opportunity to learn how to manage the arthritis in a working environment and also provided funding for training courses. I now work as an adult literacy tutor and trainee counsellor. I was concerned about going back to education and so did short courses to build up my confidence. Once I got these under my belt I felt able for more and I went on to study adult literacy with Waterford Institute of Technology and counselling with Northside Counselling Service.

Sometimes with crisis comes opportunity. Although it has been difficult balancing finances and going back to study I've discovered a potential that I never knew I had. My future could have been very bleak if funding and support had not been in place to give me this opportunity. Thanks to my new career, I now feel hopeful for my future and have more purpose in life.

Creating a voice for learners in Limerick

Learning Advocacy Officer Damien Walshe recently paid a visit to an event organised by Limerick City Adult Learners' Forum.

The Limerick City Adult Learners' Forum held an open day in Limerick to promote the work they have been involved in and to encourage more participants to get involved in the Forum. Limerick Learner Forum is the only Learner-led Forum for adult learners and originated in 2005 as a project in to celebrate European Year of Citizenship through Education. From a consultation process with 150 learners representatives were nominated from education centres across Limerick city to come together to develop a learner charter. From this, a charter was developed as a poster which was distributed to learners, tutors and coordinators.

The charter represents the voice of adult learners in Limerick and lists the expectations of learners from other learners, tutors and the centres where they learn. The Charter is based on the tagline "Good learning for us is when..." and lists nine key factors that create a positive learning experience including "We respect and support each other in and out of class" and "the place where we learn is a comfortable place, is bright and cheery and is not like school".

A learners charter

The Forum grew from this work in 2006 and now has 10 members representing learners across

Limerick City. Their role is to be a voice for learners and currently represents Learners on Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN) and having received funding from Paul Partnership, developed an event to look to target new members to the Forum, especially from communities not currently represented by the Forum.

Developing a network

The event, which took place in CIE Club, Carey's Road, was the Forums' first event for adult learners only and the focus of the day was to build up representation at local level and to work on two-way communication between the Forum and the wider learner population. It began with inputs from each of the members of the Adult Learner Forum on where it has come from, what it has achieved, what it means to the learners and what it hopes to do in the future. Learners were broken into groups to prioritise issues for the Forum. These included:

- Promotion- the Learner Forum needs to dedicate more time to advertising and use local media to do so
- Website- there is strong support for the development of a website for the forum
- Funding for non-accredited courses is a particular concern

for learners and should be a lobbying focus for the group

- Communication between learners, tutors and co-ordinators – the learner forum could provide a valuable role in linking these groups and improving communication
- Make this an annual event- there was overwhelming support from those present to have regular learner only/learner focused events
- Develop local learner forums – these could feed into the city wide group and provide an important focus for the group in the year ahead.

The Forum has recently produced its second newsletter and aims to have learner representation on more local and national groups, to build on the success from this event and continue to be at the forefront of the National Adult Learners' Forum.

If you require any more information about this event or the Limerick City Adult Learner Forum, contact Áine Lyne on 061-445795 or ainelyne@limerickcityaes.ie.

For more information on the National Adult Learners' Forum, which is facilitated by AONTAS, contact Damien Walshe on 01-4068220 or dwalshe@aontas.com.

Effective Funding for Community Education

How is a Community Education Centre funded?

A number of funding sources are required to cover the costs of a community education organisation.

Why is this a problem?

Because it means too much time is wasted on applying for funding, less time with learners and difficulty in planning long-term!

What can be done?

The Department of Education and Skills needs to create an effective mechanism for funding community education that will cover the true cost.

Why?

This will make community education more effective, in terms of time and money, and ensure that learners know what courses are available long-term.

HOW?

How to Implement

1. Funding will cover the true costs of community education
2. Multi-annual funding scheme for community education groups
3. Education provision that will be covered by the fund will include: vocational and non-vocational learning
4. Education provision that will be covered by the fund will include accredited and non-accredited learning
5. Funding mechanism will be locally managed
6. Funding will not be target-led but community-led
7. Funding administrators will have specific expertise in community education



What can I do?

Support your community education organisation. Tell your local Councillor and TD about the problem and ask them to adopt this 'whole organisation' approach. Download a leaflet from www.aontas.com





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You can also like AONTAS and the Adult Learners' Festival on Facebook