

EXPLORE



The quarterly magazine from AONTAS, the National Adult Learning Organisation

aontas



In this issue:

- *Development of the new National Adult Learner Forum*
- *Community Education Goes Virtual*
- *A Lookback at the 2015 Adult Learners' Festival*

AONTAS: The Voice of Adult Learning

Explore

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This edition's inspiring learner is Joanne McCabe from Focus Ireland

Front cover photos: L-R (1) Positive 2 Work – Winners of the Leinster Large Organisation STAR Award with a display of the work they carry out. (2) Members of Dungarvan Men's Shed demonstrating how to use OneStepUp.ie. (3) Minister for Skills, Innovation and Research Damien English and AONTAS Director, Berni Brady at the launch of the AONTAS Strategic Plan – Learning: A Lifetime's Work. (4) Boxing Clever winners of the Leinster - Small/Medium Organisation STAR Award.

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Note from the Director

Hello and welcome to this issue of *Explore*!

A number of major changes have taken place since the last issue of the *Explore* magazine. One of the key changes was the departure of Niamh Farren, Communications Officer last December to take up a new post with the Centre for Effective Services. We all wish Niamh every success in the next phase of her career but we do miss her presence in AONTAS. We hope to have a new Communications Officer on board soon. The AONTAS staff team has also been renewed by the arrival of three new staff members, Karen Williams, Reception Administrator, Christine Hynes, Membership Services Officer and Wayne Flanagan Tobin, Information Officer. Our new team has already developed an ambitious workplan for the year using our new Strategic Plan, *Learning: A Lifetime's Work*, as their guide. Our new plan which was developed in 2014 through a year long process of consultation with our members and key stakeholders was launched at the Autumn General Meeting by Minister Damien English, Minister for Skills, Innovation and Research.

As the Further Education and Training Strategy is becoming embedded in the sector AONTAS has, since the beginning of the year, been working diligently on our key task as lead agency in the development of the new National Adult Learner Forum which will have its first meeting in February 2016 during the next Adult Learners' Festival. In this issue Katie O'Rourke, Learner Supports Officer, writes about the developments so far.

Another important development for AONTAS during 2014 was the invitation by the Department of Education and Skills to take over the role of National Project Co-ordinator for the promotion of the European Agenda for Adult Learning (EAAL). The project is funded by the EU Lifelong Learning programme and co-funded by SOLAS. AONTAS had already been involved with two other partners, ETBI and NALA in the delivery of promotional activities co-ordinated by the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills during 2013. In its new role as National Co-ordinator AONTAS successfully applied for funding to develop the promotional project further from November 2014 until October 2015. Again the key partners are ETBI and NALA. AONTAS chairs an Advisory Group to the project which includes representatives from DES, SOLAS, ETBI, AEOA, INOU, NALA and Leargas. Brid Greenan, Project Co-ordinator, gives an update on the progress of the project so far.



AONTAS Director, Berni Brady

The promotional highlight of the year is the National Adult Learners' Festival which took place from the 23rd - 28th February this year. Over 350 events were organised by members throughout the country with a view to raising awareness about learning opportunities and celebrating the range and variety of work taking place in the sector. The STAR Awards ceremony took place in Dublin on Monday 23rd February to recognise outstanding work in adult education. The ceremony marked the start of the ninth Adult Learners' Festival. Nearly 300 people attended, representing thirty eight organisations shortlisted for the awards. This issue of *Explore* is dedicated to the Festival and to the fantastic work of both the award winners and all the nominated projects.

At a local level there have also been some exciting developments, one of which was the launch of the Virtual Community College, a project inspired by Liz Waters of An Cosán, designed to make learning accessible to adults in their own communities. Liz writes about the development of the College, a project we will watch with great interest.

Finally of course is our featured inspiring learner. In this issue Joanne McCabe from Focus Ireland writes about her learning journey. Her experience is sure to motivate other people to take the next step which is something AONTAS supports and encourages.

Until next time,

Berni Brady, Director, AONTAS

The National Adult Learner Forum

AONTAS has many years' experience of organising and facilitating learner events and giving people a platform to voice their issues. Examples of this include our Lobby for Learning Days in which policy makers were given the opportunity to engage in dialogue with learners, and the SOLAS Learner Consultation in which learners were given an opportunity to help influence the Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy. As a result of this work AONTAS has been named as the main lead organisation in the FET Strategy to establish a National Adult Learner Forum.

This has been identified as a specific area of work in the AONTAS Strategic Plan 2015-2018 under Goal 1: *"Advocating and lobbying for the development of a quality service for adult learners"* and in the FET Strategic Objective 3.1: *Respond to the needs of learners.*

AONTAS has been tasked to systematically benchmark learners' views and satisfaction with their FET programme on an on-going basis through the establishment of a National Adult Learner Forum.

The 1st National Adult Learner Forum meeting will take place on Wednesday 24th February 2016 during our 10th Adult Learners' Festival. Our goal is to strive to create a National Adult Learner Forum that facilitates meaningful engagement of learners across FET programmes so that learners can effectively influence national FET policy. In order to build a solid foundation for this yearly event, 2015 will serve as an exploratory year so that AONTAS can learn from stakeholders and practitioners in order to identify what learner voice mechanisms exist at local level and how they can link to the National Adult Learner Forum.

In January and February of this year AONTAS held meetings with the identified key stakeholders (ETBI, NALA, DES, INOU and SOLAS). The Stakeholder meetings proved very useful and have helped to inform and influence the development of the plan moving forward and have allowed us to gain a wider perspective on the work.



Learners voicing their views at a Lobby for Learning Day.

In developing the work of the National Adult Learner Forum AONTAS felt it was important to look at what learner engagement activities are already happening throughout the FET sector. This has involved a mapping exercise which documents both formal and informal learner voice structures at a local level.

This work began at our General Meeting in November where we gathered feedback from FET providers at our workshops. On the 23rd April 2015 AONTAS hosted a Seminar *"Engaging the Learner Voice – sharing good practice from across the FET sector"*. The Seminar for FET Practitioners highlighted the importance of learner engagement and showcased existing models of good practice within the sector. The event was designed to demonstrate and document the variety of existing learner voice activities currently taking place within FET and this in turn will build on our mapping research. The event showcased models of good practice illustrating learner voice activities and provided a networking space for FET practitioners who are, or would like to encourage learners to have a voice regarding FET provision.

If you would like further information on the National Adult Learner Forum and how you can be involved please contact Katie O'Rourke, Learner Supports Officer, korourke@aontas.com, 01-4068220.

AONTAS Launches New Strategic Plan

AONTAS launched a new Strategic Plan 'Learning: a Lifetime's Work' at its General Meeting in the Ashling Hotel, Dublin in November 2014. The plan outlines three goals that will guide the work of the organisation until 2018. They include promoting the value and benefits of adult learning and advocating for the development of a quality service. They are underpinned by a third goal which is to build our capacity as an organisation.

Minister for Skills, Innovation and Research, Damien English, launched the plan at the General Meeting. Speaking at the launch the Minister said *"the emphasis of most education and training provision today is on upskilling people for employment which in the current climate is very understandable. However, there is also an important place in education provision for personal development programmes and those that provide tuition on the softer skills that communities need to be able to live together for the good of all their members. The social and personal benefits to the participant, whether in their home life, engaging with their family, or in the way they participate in their local communities, are immeasurable."*

Berni Brady, Director of AONTAS said, *"As the further education and training service develops, its ultimate success will be assessed by how it works for the Learner, the benefits it brings to them and to the economic recovery of the country. AONTAS believes that adult learners are the most important*

stakeholders for both SOLAS and the ETBs, and can provide feedback to enhance the quality of the Further Education and Training service. Learners can also highlight actions needed to provide greater equality of opportunity as they have first-hand experience about the real life barriers to participation. We look forward to working with our partner organisations in the Further Education and Training sector to set up a National Adult Learner Forum."

Over 100 representatives from the adult and community education sector in Ireland attended the launch. Learner representatives recently appointed to a number of Education and Training Boards around the country were also in attendance.

Michael Moriarty, General Secretary of Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) addressed the meeting and said: *"The ETBs have a big responsibility in delivering the further education and training service. Each ETB now has a learner representative, this is in recognition of the importance of the learner."*

The strategic plan demonstrates the commitment of AONTAS to promoting the value and benefits of adult learning, and to advocating for a quality service that meets the needs of all learners, including those who return to education to improve their employment prospects.



Pictured at the launch of 'Learning: a Lifetime's Work' - Minister for Skills, Research and Innovation Damien English, Berni Brady (AONTAS), Liz Waters (President, AONTAS) and Michael Moriarty (General Secretary, ETBI).

Staff Members

AONTAS would like to welcome three new staff members to our team. We are delighted to have them on board to help us with progressing the work of our new Strategic Plan.



Christine Hynes
Membership Services Officer

Christine has overall responsibility for the co-ordination and implementation of the AONTAS membership services plan in line with the objectives of the Strategic Plan. She is also responsible for membership accounts. Christine works in collaboration with AONTAS management, AONTAS membership, the Executive Committee and staff to provide services to members and to strengthen and develop the membership base of AONTAS.



Karen Williams
Reception Administrator

Karen is the first point of contact to the organisation and as such holds a vital position in ensuring a professional and efficient service is given to each new caller. Karen will also provide support to the Head of Organisation Development in ensuring the efficient running of the foundation supports for the organisation. Karen will provide administrative support to the staff of the organisation.



Wayne Flanagan Tobin
Information Officer

AONTAS in line with its Strategic Plan provides a quality responsive Information Referral Service for the general public to assist potential adult learners in making appropriate learning choices. As the Information Officer, Wayne is responsible for, in collaboration with members of the AONTAS Information Team, the delivery of accurate and up to date information on further education and training opportunities for adults wishing to return to learning. He will also be responsible for identifying, developing and maintaining resources needed to deliver an effective service as well as tracking the paths of adult learners and reporting on outcomes and trends.

AONTAS Staff take part in ERASMUS+ Mobilities

In order to improve AONTAS's knowledge of European adult education policy development and influence, Niamh O'Reilly, Head of Strategic Development, participated in ERASMUS+ KA1 funded job shadowing mobilities with the EAEA Secretary General, Gina Ebner, in Tallin and in Brussels. The two mobilities focused on exploring new developments in European lifelong learning policy, namely the European Agenda for Adult Learning and the re-organisation of the European Commission under the new Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, in particular the movement of adult education policy from the Directorate General (DG) Education to DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. The mobility

involved conversations with Gina Ebner, insights into European institutions and the links between the EAEA and the wider civil society lifelong learning movement. The mobility also involved inputs directly from Commission staff and an MEP, thus providing an overview of the direction of lifelong learning policy and the role of civil society in advocating on behalf of adult learners.

Brid Greenan, EAAL Project Co-ordinator, also took part in a mobility, through the EAEA Younger Staff Training in Adult Education in Brussels. Ten people participated in the training, representing 7 countries: Austria, Belgium, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Georgia and Ireland. The aim of the training was



Participants at the EAEA Younger Staff Training

to create awareness of European developments in adult education and lifelong learning, to understand advocacy work at European level, to exchange information and knowledge about each other's organisations and adult education backgrounds and to learn about the EAEA and other civil society organisations. The training involved seminars, group work and a number of study visits to the European Structures, as well as presentations on the workings of these institutions. She also attended a conference organised by SOLIDAR 'Investing in Education and Lifelong Learning' at the European Parliament. Over the course of the training Brid got the opportunity to discuss adult education in Ireland and participant countries, exchange experiences and establish links and networks with the participants.

Erasmus+ Key Action 1 – What is it all about?

Key Action 1 Adult Education Staff Training supports the professional development of adult education staff through mobility projects in order to:

- Support the professional development of those who work in adult education.
- Enhance foreign language competence.
- Raise participant's awareness and understanding of other cultures and countries, offering an opportunity to build a network of international contacts.
- Actively participate in society and develop a sense of European citizenship and identity.
- Increase the capacities, attractiveness and international dimension of adult education organisations so that they are able to offer activities and programmes that better respond to the needs of individuals, within and outside Europe.
- Reinforce synergies between formal, non-formal education, employment and entrepreneurship.
- Ensure better recognition of competencies gained through learning periods abroad.

AONTAS Out and About Fairs and Exhibitions 2014

In 2014 AONTAS staff attended numerous education and training fairs throughout the country. As a national organisation these events offer us a great opportunity to meet learners face to face; to get a flavour of the issues they may be facing; to network with other organisations; to distribute information about Onestepup.ie and to promote our annual Adult Learners' Festival. *By KATIE O'ROURKE*



Mairéad Tynan promoting What Next? at Which Course.

The Which Course Expo, Dublin's largest course fair took place in August and coincided with the Jobs Expo. The event was held in Croke Park. AONTAS attended the event which was aimed at prospective students and job seekers in the greater Dublin area. The event was well attended with a variety of queries about courses and returning to education. Events like these give AONTAS a chance to make valuable connections with adult learners so we can best represent their voice and the challenges that they are facing in returning to education.

We also attended the Cork Adult Education Fair which took place in the City Hall in September and was organised by the Cork Adult Education Council. This is the second year that AONTAS have attended and again it was a fantastic event that was extremely well organised. There was a great range of organisations in attendance that catered to a wide range of needs. A series of workshops took place over the two days providing useful tips for learners including employment skills. It was a chance for AONTAS to network with learners and organisations in the Cork area.

AONTAS Around the Country

In April and May of 2014, AONTAS staff attended the Limerick Jobs and Advice Fair which took place in the Strand Hotel Limerick and the Waterford Jobs and Advice Fair which took place in the City Library. The events were organised by the International Employment Services/EURES and were well attended over the two day period. The events were aimed at Irish and EU workers looking for jobs locally and throughout Europe as well as people who were interested in education and training options. It was attended by local employers and locally based Employment Advice Agencies as well as organisations offering upskilling opportunities. AONTAS dealt with a variety of queries from returning to education to employment opportunities.



AONTAS Staff with Liadh Ni Riada Sinn Féin MEP at the Ploughing Championships.



Katie O'Rourke, Learner Supports Officer, at the EURES Fair in Waterford.

Ploughing Championships

AONTAS attended the Ploughing Championships for the second time in September 2014, where there was a record number of people in attendance. 279,500 people visited the three day event in Ratheniska near Stradbally in Co. Laois. It was a great experience and there was a great mix of people attending from young to old and from every corner of the

country. It offered AONTAS a chance to promote the work that we do and to disseminate information to potential adult learners and the rural community.

AONTAS staff are available to attend Adult and Community Education Fairs and Exhibitions, subject to staff resources available. If you are planning an event in 2015 and would like AONTAS to attend please email Wayne, wtobin@aontas.com or call 014068220.

Do you have an information event happening in 2015? If so you can include details of your event on the One Step Up calendar. See OneStepUp.ie for details.

What Next? Booklet

Big changes have taken place within the Further Education and Training sector and this can create confusion for learners. Our Information Booklet, "What Next", aims to guide learners through their education and training options in a simple and straightforward format. The booklet includes a broad financial supports section, a thorough list of learning opportunities including upskilling and training options, and further education programmes. You can access a copy at: www.aontas.com/whatnext/.

Events that AONTAS attended in 2014:

- Donegal Adult Learners' Festival, January
- Central Library, Dublin, February
- EURES Fair, Blanchardstown, February
- Cavan/Monaghan Adult Learners' Fair, February
- Info Stand, Women's Breakfast, Marley Park, March
- Ballymun Youth Guarantee Fair, March
- EURES Fair, Limerick, April
- Wicklow Adult Education Fair, April
- DSP Fair, Finglas, April
- EURES Fair, Waterford, May
- DSP Fair Ashbourne, June
- DSP Training and Education Fair, Swords, August
- DSP Training and Education Fair, Tallaght, August
- Cork Adult Education Fair, September
- Which Course, September
- Ballymun Whitehall Fair, September
- Ploughing Championships, September
- DSP Fair Finglas, October
- DSP Fair Swords, September
- Irish Men's Sheds Conference, October
- Ballyfermot Partnership Fair, November
- Meath Partnership Fair, November
- Dublin Inner City Fair, November
- Ahead Better Options Fair, November

Skills for Work Celebrate their Nationwide STAR Award



Mary Hennessy Skills For Work, Mary Roche ALO Tipperary ETB, Berni Brady AONTAS, Lavenia English Tipperary ETB and Marian Lynch National Co-ordinator.

On Monday April 13th Berni Brady, AONTAS Director, was invited to attend a celebration of the Nationwide STAR Award Winner, the Skills for Work Programme. The celebration was opened by Marian Lynch, National Adult Literacy and Community Education Co-ordinator and Paddy Lavelle, CEO, Dublin and Dun Laoighaire ETB. The event was attended by the co-ordinators of the nationwide programme who received framed copies of the Award Certificate and the beautiful trophy was proudly displayed for all to see.

Learners were represented by Neil Butler of An Post who had completed the programme and spoke enthusiastically of his experience, explaining how the training had not only enhanced his skills and confidence but had given him the motivation to pursue further learning opportunities. Paul Cummings, Training and Development Manager of An Post spoke highly of the value of the programme to employers emphasising the importance of lifelong learning for a skilled and confident workforce. The programme has also reached out to learners in rural areas, many of them farmers who now need digital skills to do



Skills for Work Regional Coordinators.



Berni Brady AONTAS, Paddy Lavelle CEO DDLETB, Neil Butler An Post.

much of their business. Eddie Downey, President of the Irish Farmers Association acknowledged the importance of the programme for upskilling people working in the farming sector and re-iterating the Association's support for the work. Berni also emphasised the importance of recognising the many benefits of the Skills for Work programme and how it demonstrated best practice in adult learning.

The event also provided an opportunity to mingle and talk with the practitioners who are responsible for the delivery of the programme and enjoy their infectious enthusiasm for their work, and their commitment to the needs of learners. The event ended with a delicious lunch provided by the ETB Youthreach students.

Dreams by ALá Participatory Theatre Galway

ALá Social Inclusion, Outreach and Training Project were the 2015 winners of the Connaught STAR Award. Recently they debuted their extraordinary new play – Dreams. The show was a culmination of a year's work for the group. The show was split into three sections and the audience were treated to two mini plays and a dramatic recital of Seamus Heaney's Digging. The plays dealt with various aspects of social life such as homelessness and community regeneration. The second half was a Forum Theatre presentation about organisations having to tick boxes to get funding with the possibility of losing their identity while doing so. The whole play was a great example of community spirit and AONTAS are looking forward to seeing what the group produces in the future.



Ferdia Watts, Caroline McDonagh and William Casserly – Members of ALá Participatory Theatre Galway.

Community Education goes Virtual

Using 21st century teaching and learning technologies, community education is the tool to fast track individuals and communities out of poverty all over Ireland. *By Liz Waters*



Liz Waters, Director of the Virtual Community College

Access to Higher Education

Community education as a model to connect with and support the most marginalised in their pursuit of education and employment is already proven. Like many other community education centres An Cosán facilitates 600 students annually to access education, combating educational disadvantage in Tallaght West for almost 30 years.

“Some 99% of Dublin 6 students go on to third-level. The Higher Education Authority finds level of college entrants down to 15% in other parts of Dublin”

Irish Times: 17 July, 2014

We entered the arena of higher education provision when we realised that there were many students unable to engage in higher education as it is currently provided by institutions of higher education. We were asked by local community leaders to provide higher education programmes in leadership and community development and community drugs work. In a collaborative partnership with IT Carlow we developed two degrees which we believe fit a social action model of community education and which we have delivered in An Cosán for the past 7 years.

An Cosán Virtual Community College

Education is now global, digital, and accessible to communities and individuals wherever they are. E-learning, virtual teaching and learning is a significant tool to combat poverty, a tool little used for this purpose. An Cosán has developed a Virtual Community College to deliver higher education programmes

to students all over Ireland through virtual blended teaching and learning supported by personalised scaffolding for each student. These programmes remove barriers experienced by people struggling with poverty, reducing cost, time and place barriers thus increasing access to higher education via Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs). We are currently in a position to offer three BA Degrees at QQI Level 7; Transformative Community Education, Leadership and Community Development and Community Development and Addiction Studies and we plan to commence delivery in September 2015. The Degrees will be delivered in a modular framework; individual modules can be taken or an entire degree.

Community Partners

We cannot achieve this on our own, partners with vision and will are required. An Cosán will offer a range of Virtual Learning Programmes in partnership with community education centres around the country. We want to create a network of community education centres which are technologically enhanced and able to avail of the most up-to-date technologies to augment the higher education programmes they deliver. We want to create an online repository of resources where they can freely access curricula, advice and supports, allowing greater accessibility to education in disadvantaged communities thereby enhancing the quality educational outcomes.

We have already established partnerships with Southill Family Resource Centre, Limerick, Clare Women's Network and Longford Women's Link and One Family. It is intended that these partnerships will be mutually beneficial, both for An Cosán and community education organisations, in that it is underpinned by a process of dialogue and learning in order to create valuable, supportive education experiences for students alongside a range of e-learning tools and resources for tutors and community education organisations. This project aims to facilitate community education organisations to support students to access e-learning and virtual learning programmes at a more affordable rate, lessen the digital divide and empower individual learners, their families and communities.

We are entering a new era of education where technology will be a powerful tool in its development and delivery and it is my dream that community education will lead out in this new field.

One Step Up: An Update on the EU Campaign

During 2013 AONTAS was invited by the Department of Education and Skills to participate in an EU Campaign to raise awareness and encourage participation in adult learning. *By Brid Greenan*

The awareness raising campaign which is funded by the European Commission involves a website www.onestepup.ie, a Freephone Helpline 1800 303 669 and an online calendar of events. The overall objective of the project was to increase participation in adult learning, in particular targeting adults with basic skills. A number of activities were developed to support these objectives. A steering group which included representatives from across the adult learning sector was established to oversee the work.

Project Activities

The following activities were developed in order to promote the objectives: a microsite www.onestepup.ie was developed to act as a portal and bring together various sources of information under a single online campaign. The site includes video testimonials from adult learners along with frequently asked questions about adult learning.

A simple online tool was developed to help adults access the services they needed in their local area. Four questions were developed and users were asked to complete them in order to identify the contacts and resources most appropriate to their needs. A Freephone Helpline was established, to deal with queries from people who had difficulty navigating the website. The Freephone number was promoted through the website www.onestepup.ie. The calendar was developed and integrated within www.onestepup.ie so that it could be promoted as part of the campaign brand. A database of events was established and education providers were contacted to include details about their events. Visitors to the website were offered an option for reminders about local learning events through email or text message.

Promotion

Promotion of both the Helpline and the online calendar was supported through the development of the website www.onestepup.ie which provided a campaign brand and 'one stop shop' for campaign activities. Promotional activities included:



Saint Saviours Community Drama Group demonstrating how easy it is to use OneStepUp.ie

- **National radio advertising campaign** – The website was promoted through a radio ad which ran on three national radio stations
- **Press Release** – A press release was issued to launch the calendar of the website
- **Stakeholder engagement** – Relevant organisations were informed about the site and encouraged to host a link on their own website. Information was disseminated via a range of different e-bulletins. Services included within the site were engaged over the course of the project and encouraged to disseminate information directly to the target groups
- **Presentations** - A presentation was made at the AONTAS General Meeting to over 100 attendees. Presentations were also made to delegations visiting Ireland from Croatia and Finland as part of their EAAL work
- **Fairs and Exhibitions** – A simple flyer was developed in-house to promote the campaign name, website and Freephone number. This was disseminated to adults attending local education and training exhibitions. This was an effective way of reaching the target group.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

- **Online advertising** – As a charity, AONTAS availed of a Google Grant which helped to establish and promote the website and enhanced existing resources. A Google mentor helped optimise the site. The website was also advertised on the popular Boards.ie website during August 2014
- **Social Media** – The website was promoted through two separate social media campaigns: one in April 2014 to raise awareness about the site, the second campaign was developed in August 2014 specifically to promote the online calendar of events

Evaluation

Evaluation of the campaign website, online calendar and referral service was informed by the following perspectives:

- Feedback from the stakeholders, through the project steering committee
- Feedback from adult education providers, captured during regular updates of their contact details on the website
- General data analytics on the use of the website including capturing user engagement using the online tool. Some elements of the site were redesigned in April 2014 based on analytics and in order to make it more user-friendly
- Interaction and engagement with people contacting the Freephone Helpline Referral Service, including a snapshot follow on survey to capture their progress from the Referral Service.

Project Outcomes

The project helped create greater levels of awareness about adult learning. During the course of this project almost 7,000 people were referred (both online and over the phone) to services, support and information that they needed to take up education and training. This is evident through the following information:

Engagement with OneStepUp.ie

- **10,751** website users, with **39,948** page views
- **6,048** completed user profiles captured through the campaign

Freephone Helpline Referral

- **679** people contacted the Freephone Helpline
- **738** events were promoted through the calendar on the website.

The project also helped inform a better understanding of the challenges facing adult learners:

Online Referral

- There were **6,048** completed user profiles on the website. A user profile is the information gathered from a user's interaction with the site – i.e. answers to all four questions fully completed
- **41%** of completed profiles were looking for information about courses. 25% were looking for information about guidance/advice
- **51%** were aged between 35-65 years old
- **15%** described themselves as unemployed, 32% described themselves as long term unemployed. 34% were employed
- **46%** of those who were long term unemployed were looking for information about courses
- **16%** of those who were employed were looking for information about basic skills

The project helped build better relationships with stakeholders:

- **33** Stakeholders or supporting organisations were included
- **16** Stakeholder organisations included links to www.onestepup.ie on their website

Plans for the Future

AONTAS continues to maintain and update the OneStepUp website. Following consultation with the Department of Education and Skills, and SOLAS (the new Further Education and Training Authority), AONTAS has been designated the National Co-ordinator for the European Agenda on Adult Learning in Ireland. The next stage of the project 'Taking the Next Steps' started in November 2014 and runs until November 2015 and builds on developments of the previous project. Key activities include:

- Analysis of the PIAAC data around specific themes, using the information in a series of seminars to inform the work of the FET Strategy and to enhance service delivery.
- Further developments of the One Step Up website
- Promoting the services of local providers by supporting them to organise events.

Adult Learners' Festival 2015

Learning: A Lifetime's Work

The 9th Adult Learners' Festival ran nationwide from the 23 – 28 February. This section features some of the highlights from this year's festival.

The Adult Learners' Festival launches with a 'Performance in Progress'

Learners from Castlerea Adult Education & VTOS Centre in Co. Roscommon, helped launch the programme of events for the 9th AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival. The launch event saw local artist, Steve McCahill, work with first & second year learners to create a piece of multimedia artwork that was dynamic, vibrant and which captured the festival theme of 'Learning: A Lifetime's Work'. This was put on display in the centre for the duration of the festival.

Steve McCahill, better known as 'Flick', spent all his of working life in construction. It is only since the recession that Steve has realised his potential as a mixed media artist. Self taught, he began his career as a street artist in London in the 1970s. The father of six children, Steve returned to Adult Education in Castlerea where he found that his talent was recognized and appreciated. Adult Education has been the platform for his creative growth and development.

Kathleen McNulty, VTOs Coordinator said, "We are delighted that AONTAS, the advocacy body for adult learners selected Castlerea Adult Education & VTOS Centre to launch the Adult Learners' Festival 2015. Our Art students are thrilled to be able to showcase their skills and talents on a national stage, a very fitting showcase for our first Art graduates. Our ethos which advocates learning by doing, ensures that significant learning takes place in all subject areas of VTOS".

Castlerea Adult Education & VTOS Centre is part of Galway



Lots of patience & skills is required to create the artwork.

& Roscommon Education and Training Board. It offers adults a second chance at education with learners achieving QQI accredited awards at levels 4 & 5. Their main focus is on the development of the learner, both academically and socially, and it is important to them that each learner leaves the centre with a heightened sense of motivation and expectation to achieve the very best that is possible.

AONTAS Director, Berni Brady said, "In 2014, nearly 20,000 learners throughout Ireland received a major award at levels 4 & 5. Adult Education Centres like Castlerea do fantastic work on a daily basis though the difference they make to the community can quite often go unnoticed. In a time of limited resources it is essential that organisations collaborate in order to promote the work that they do. The Festival, with its nationwide reach, is the perfect opportunity to do so."



Steve McCahill, aka 'Flick', showing off his graffiti skills.



A learner and his clay self portrait.

A Snapshot of Events from Around the Country

The 2015 Adult Learners' Festival ran from the 23rd – 28th February. Over 350 events took place throughout the country. During the Festival there were open days and coffee mornings offering up to date information about learning opportunities in the local area. Museums, galleries and libraries opened their doors to learners by giving them the chance to explore their collections and discover new ways to learn. During the week adults took the challenge of learning something new - whether it was digital photography, social media, history or cookery. Here is a flavour of some of the events that took place nationwide this year.

Kerry

With 2015 being the European Year of Development, Kerry One World Centre along with Kerry County Council LA21 support, organised a half day symposium in the Institute of Technology, Tralee on February 20th to mark the year and stimulate debate locally on sustainable development. The group secured esteemed speakers with lots of expertise who provided an interesting symposium with much food for thought. Contributing speakers on the day were: Ms. Aisling Sharkey, Head of Social Sciences Department, (ITT); Robert Carey (NEKD); Micheal O'Coileain (KCC); Dr. Colm O'Doherty (ITT); Feidhlim O'Seasain (ECO-UNESCO); Johnny Sheehan (Dochas) and the moderator was Sean Lyons.

Leitrim

On Tuesday, 25th February Katie O'Rourke, Learner Supports Officer, attended the Leitrim Education and Training Board event '*Celebrate Yourself and Reach for New Possibilities*' which took place in The Bush Hotel in Carrick on Shannon. They were holding the event as part of the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival and the aim of the event was to bring learners together and inspire them to continue on their learning journey and to reach their true potential. Learners from a wide range of programmes were in attendance including BTEI, VTOS & PLC courses and nearly 200 learners showed up on the day from all over Leitrim. The Guidance Service organised the event and it was learner centred from start to finish.



Getting into the swing of things at Kildare's 'Learning Café'.

Kildare

The Community Education Service with support from the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board held '*The Learning Cafe*' in Castledermot which celebrated community education throughout County Kildare. Ten different community groups and courses were displayed at the annual event which is part of the nationwide AONTAS Adult Learners Festival. One of the highlights of the evening was an emotional performance of "The Short Grass" by the Curragh Pride Men's Group. The monologue with musical accompaniment was written by the men as part of a Making Music project with tutor Dave Morrissey and which was funded by the Community Education Service.

The performance was followed by a very well received presentation by guest speaker, Peter Hussey from Crooked House Theatre Company, who highlighted the potential of community art to help communities express themselves and contribute to real change. Earlier in the evening two fully booked taster workshops were offered; an Introduction to Community Arts with tutor Mary Pat Moloney and Motivating Yourself and Your Group with tutor Joe Lawlor.

The audience on the night included members of adult learner groups from around the county, tutors and the showcase participants from Castledermot Young at Heart, Naas Arts & Crafts Shed, Women's Integration Network, Athy, Rosconnell Community Group, Ashgrove Residents Association, Eve Harvest and the Curragh Pride Men's Group.



Showing off their moves at Clonmel Dance Workshop .



Fethard Well Being Workshop.

Laois

Portlaoise Further Education Centre in association with Laois & Offaly Education & Training Board held a number of events for the Festival. Brendan from the Ambulance Service gave a presentation on Basic First Aid to adult learners at the centre. Sarah Cosgrave from the Money and Budgeting Advice Service offered financial and budgeting advice to adult learners. Learners also attended an art exhibition in the Dunamase Arts Centre which displayed some of their artworks.

Tipperary

To celebrate the Adult Learners' Festival Veronica Crowe, Community Education Facilitator with Tipperary Education & Training Board and the local link for the Festival, organised various workshops such as Yoga, Art, Mindfulness and Computers in different centres throughout South Tipperary.

Tuesday 24th February saw over 30 women getting together in the Fethard Youth Centre for a Health and Well Being Workshop. This workshop focused on mindfulness, beauty care and cookery, a great healthy start for 2015.

On Thursday 26th February, Theresia Guschlbauer kept the adult learners on their toes and moving to the rhythm with a Modern Dance workshop in Clonmel. This workshop focused on core strength, flexibility, creativity and most of all laughter and fun. This was followed by scones and refreshments served in the Tipperary ETB Adult Learner Canteen. Both workshops were a huge success.

AONTAS would like to say a big thank you to everyone that took part in the Festival this year & helped us to celebrate and promote adult learning. The 2015 Festival really helped show that 'Learning is a Lifetime's Work'. Next year we will be celebrating 10 years of the Festival so put next February in your diary for an extra special Festival!



Naas Arts and Crafts Group .

The 2015 STAR Awards Ceremony

The 2015 AONTAS STAR Awards took place on Monday 23rd February in the Ballsbridge Hotel, Dublin, to recognise outstanding work in adult education. The ceremony marked the start of the ninth Adult Learners' Festival.



Berni Brady, AONTAS Director, Dr. Tom Collins, Chairperson of the Governing Body of the DIT, Una Buckley, Adult Learner Representative and Liz Waters, AONTAS President.

Nearly 300 people attended the STAR Awards ceremony, representing thirty eight organisations shortlisted for the awards. The projects represented a wide range of adult learning organisations including areas such as disability, mental health, older people and the unemployed.

The ceremony kicked off with some inspiring singing by the Forget-Me-Nots who are a community choir from Dublin's North East. The choir embraces social inclusion for the elderly, their families, carers, friends and neighbours, and a particular welcome is made for those families affected by memory loss conditions. Its membership reaches into all parts of the community to include residents from the local nursing homes. The event was officially opened by Dr. Tom Collins, Chairperson of the Governing Body of the DIT. Speaking at the Awards, Dr. Tom Collins said, *"Most people in adult education have encountered a hurdle that they have had to overcome – be it social, economic or personal. All the projects today have enabled and empowered people to do this."*

Next up was Una Buckley, an Adult Learner Representative, who gave the keynote address. Ms Buckley echoed Dr. Collins sentiments by saying that, *"Community is all about helping one another and helping those behind us up the ladder. Every single one of the winning projects today demonstrates this."* Her speech was truly inspiring and was mentioned as one of the highlights of the ceremony for many of the participants.

Like the past eight Star Awards, the competition was stiff with 71 nominations received over the seven categories: Small/Medium and Large organisations in Leinster and Munster, Small/Medium organisations in Connaught and then Ulster and Nationwide. The judges then had the difficult task of whittling these down to a shortlist of just 38 projects. For the third year running, the five judging panels travelled around the country to meet with these projects face to face and to choose their seven winning projects. As always the regional meetings were a wonderful opportunity to meet with the providers and learners for both the judges and the AONTAS staff and to learn about all the wonderful work taking place throughout the country.



The Forget-Me-Nots, a community choir from Dublin's North East.

After the inspiring keynote address by Una Buckley came the prize giving, the most anticipated part of the ceremony. The seven outstanding adult learning initiatives who beat such tremendous competition were:

- **Connaught** - ALá Social Inclusion, Outreach and Training Project
- **Ulster** - Supporting Active Engagement
- **Leinster Large Organisation** - Positive to Work.
- **Leinster Small/Medium Organisation** – Boxing Clever
- **Munster Large Organisation** – The Village Project
- **Munster Small/Medium Organisation** – Making Connections
- **Nationwide** – Skills for Work

The seven awards were presented by Dr. Collins and Una Buckley. Once again the audience got the opportunity to listen to learners from the winning projects talk about the huge difference participating in the projects had made to their lives. Berni Brady, Director of AONTAS summed up the STAR awards and the outstanding winners by saying that *“The STAR Awards is a wonderful opportunity to highlight the fantastic work that all the shortlisted projects carry out. The competition to be crowned the winner is very tough as the calibre is extremely high. Winning a STAR Award is a great achievement and a testament to all the work that the learners and the organisers put into their project.”*

The STAR Awards Ceremony was only the beginning of a wonderful week of celebration and learning with over three hundred and fifty free events taking place throughout the country. There was a huge range of events to cater to all tastes, interest and skills levels. The events were held by a range of providers including libraries, ETBs, adult education providers, community groups, museums, galleries and private businesses. At AONTAS we are looking forward to making the Festival even bigger and better for 2016 and celebrating its 10 year anniversary!



A full house at the 2015 STAR Awards Ceremony.

The 2015 STAR Award Winners

Seven outstanding adult learning projects received a STAR Award in recognition of their work. Here is a bit more about the fantastic work that these projects carry out.

Ulster

Supporting Active Engagement

Supporting Active Engagement is a digital inclusion project for older people living in Folds and sheltered accommodation across Northern Ireland. The project aims to help older people get online by learning to use tablets. The project has a specific focus on helping people access information about their rights and entitlements. It is unique in that it utilises volunteers to empower older people on their digital journey. Another fundamental strand of the project is a dedicated Older People's Information Officer to undertake financial inclusion work and provide benefit entitlement assessments solely for older people.



Munster (Large Organisations)

The Village Project

The project is for young individuals with a mild intellectual disability and/or autism. Its aims are to address 4 metrics - work, training, education and recreation. As the current climate is not great for employment options the group thought that they might try to establish their own business. So they came up with the concept of an art gallery, craft centre and coffee dock as a way to draw the public in and for individuals to gain valuable skills. This has been done by linking in with local artists.

Munster (Small/Medium Organisations)

Making Connections South Tipperary

Making Connections South Tipperary is a unique training programme that offers a re-introduction to education and training for adults experiencing substance misuse, homelessness and substance related mental health difficulties. Participants work in small groups or one to one based on the individual learners needs. This project provides QQI Level 3 training leading to an award in Employability Skills.





Leinster (Large Organisations)

Positive 2 Work

This programme was a partnership between Louth and Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB), Skillnet, DSP and Horseware and aimed to deliver educational and work experience to long-term unemployed 18-25 year olds. SkillNet were approached by Horseware, a local employer, to see if they could participate in a programme catering for that target group. DSP were tasked with gathering expressions of interest from eligible candidates. LMETB were responsible for providing the classroom element of the programme and Horseware provided learners with extensive work experience. The purpose of the programme was to build learners

educational and workplace skills to prepare them for any future opportunities that may arise. There was no guarantee of employment at the end of the programme but 7 of the 13 learners who completed it received 6 month full-time employment contracts with Horseware, with the possibility that these positions may become permanent.

Leinster (Small/Medium Organisations)

Boxing Clever

Boxing Clever is a 20-week progressive rehabilitation programme with an emphasis on adult education, sports education, and addiction awareness designed to offer a marginalised and socially excluded group, stable and drug free service users, the opportunity to re-integrate back into mainstream society through the medium of a psych-educational framework underpinned by the philosophy of peer mentoring. So far, the programme has been offered 4 times since 2012 and has involved 80 learners. Theoretical study for 2 FETAC certificates in Health-Related Fitness and Community Addiction Studies is coupled with physical training including boxing skills and DCC gym training.



Connaught

ALá Social Inclusion, Outreach and Training Project

ALá is a fully inclusive personal, social & community development organization. It uses theatre arts & education as developmental tools. Founded in 2004 it is a not for profit organisation run by the participants and has charitable status. It has a full and part time voluntary staff whose dedication and commitment has made ALá so successful. Their vision is a society that enables everyone to increase self-esteem and confidence by creating theatre that celebrates diversity and inspires positive change. Performance is at the heart of everything that they do and brings together all sectors of the community.

Nationwide

Skills for Work Project

Skills for Work is a national programme aimed at providing training opportunities to help employees deal with the basic skills demands of the workplace. The target group is working adults who have achieved less than upper second level education or with outdated skills. A SFW programme includes a variety of subjects, e.g communications or computers.



STARs on the Rise - STAR Awards Shortlist 2015

Remember if you weren't successful this year try again for the Star Awards 2016. It will be an extra special year too as we will be celebrating ten years of the Adult Learners' Festival.

Ulster

- Sagaction: Enhancing the wellbeing of older people through Open Learning
- Supporting Active Engagement
- Change Makers
- Higher Attainment Through Cross Border Hubs (HATCH)

Munster - Large Organisations

- The Village Project
- U-Casadh Limited

Munster - Small/Medium Organisations

- Dungarvan Men's Shed
- Ennis CDP Primary Health Care Programme for Travellers
- Leadership and Advocacy Programme at Limerick Institute of Technology
- St. Saviour's Community Drama Group
- Making Connections South Tipperary

- Kilrush Men's Shed Wind Turbine Project
- The Power of Partnerships
- Job Sampling Initiative

Leinster - Large Organisations

- Healthcare Support Programme for Students with literacy difficulties
- Foundations Project
- Young Women into Technology
- Spirasi Education and Integration programme
- RADE - Recovery through art, drama, education
- Positive 2 Work
- Group Learning harnessing MOOCs - a Wexford model
- The Recovery Continuum

Leinster - Small/Medium Organisations

- Artistic Entrepreneurship at CFCP
- Boxing Clever

- 'Drogheda Counts'
- How are you feeling today?
- Monsignor McCarthy Family Resource Centre
- Storysacks - A Family Learning Project
- The Intercultural Drop-in Centre
- The Recovery Project

Connaught

- ALá Social Inclusion, Outreach and Training Project
- Horsemanship Skills Program
- RWN Training Services
- The Harvest Studios
- The Directions Programme

Nationwide

- Inclusive Learning Initiative
- Looking Forward Warehousing and Logistics Course
- Skills for Work Project
- The Irish Men's Sheds Association

AONTAS Festival Inspires a New US University International Service Learning Course *By Debora Nelli*

As a participant of the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival and guest at the STAR Awards ceremony in 2014, I was impressed by the passionate commitment of Irish adult and community educators to inclusive, student centered learning at all stages of adult life. Participation in the Festival provided excellent opportunities to connect and share best practices and collaborations with Irish adult and community educators. The STAR Awards ceremony was such an excellent professional celebration of the dedication and innovation of adult and community education, I knew that this could provide an inspiring educational experience for Western students in the Adult and Higher Education and Human Services Programs.

My experiences participating in the 2014 AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival served as a catalyst for the development of a new 5 credit course at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington, USA, entitled International Adult Education Service Learning in Dublin Ireland. Western students collaborate with Irish adult and community educators to

develop and provide free workshops for the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival.

This year our first section of the International Adult Education Service Learning in Dublin course participated in the 2015 AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival. Eight Western Washington University students began their international service learning experience with attendance at the Star Awards ceremony showcasing innovative Irish adult education projects.

Networking with Irish adult education program coordinators, staff and learners at the AONTAS ceremony provided a rich and exciting learning experience for the group. Western Washington University students were impressed and inspired by the creative program ideas and the diversity in adult and community programs highlighted and learners being served.



The Western Washington University Study Group with coordinator Dr. Debora Nelli.

Here are a few comments from the final class reflections that share some inspirational learning moments from the STAR Awards:

"Seeing the STAR Award winners at the ceremony opened my eyes to other possible ways I could help others through adult education. It was really cool to see all those different projects and people working together".

"Attending the STAR Awards ceremony was an encouraging experience that set a foundation for the coming week's adult education service learning projects we were doing in Dublin".

"I liked that the STAR Awards had all different sizes of programs featured so you could see an array of types of groups offering different kinds of adult learning".

The students who enrolled in this year's course are sharing the wonderful stories of their Irish international service learning experience with classmates who want to attend next year. Participation in this wonderful annual event will truly be a memorable highlight of many of our adult and higher education student's educational experience at Western. Western Washington University is grateful for the warm welcome and generous spirit of inclusion shared with our students from AONTAS staff and Irish adult and community educators. We look forward to many more years of continued friendship and inspiring collaborations.

Dutch Study Visit – Learn for Life

In February of this year AONTAS hosted a delegation from LEARN FOR LIFE, the Dutch platform for international adult learning. This study visit was held during the AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival 2015. The objectives of this Erasmus+ Mobility was to learn from AONTAS; how to organise an Adult Learners' Festival with the support of local and national politicians and decision makers, how to create more support for the Adult Learners' Festival, how target groups can be reached and be an active part of the festival and finally how to target unemployed people to keep developing on both a personal and professional level.

The training programme included:

- Attendance at the AONTAS Star Awards ceremony where the participants met and networked with adult learners and providers of adult education from all over the country.
- A visit to Warrenmount Community Education Centre who have been actively involved in the Festival for many years. The Centre is committed to an innovative approach to community-based adult education. The participants had a meeting with a visiting American study group and staff of the centre to discuss Community Education in Ireland, Holland and America. They also interacted with a Buddy reading group in the centre.
- A presentation was given by Berni Brady & Kathryn Laing from AONTAS. This included: an introduction to the Adult Learners' Festival in Ireland, its development over the years, strategies to stimulate local Festival activities and networks, strategies to involve politicians, decision-makers and stakeholders in the media strategy and the use of the STAR Awards in order to disseminate learners' stories and outstanding adult education projects.
- A visit to Tallaght Education Centre which provides education, training and support for unemployed people. The participants met with Maire Redmond from the centre and received a talk on how they motivate local people to become more involved in their community and encourage greater interaction with local groups and organisations, to assist them in overcoming the cycle of unemployment and poverty.
- A visit to Tallaght Men's Shed which was set up improve the wellbeing of men through meaningful projects. The participants met with the men who run the shed and got their perspective on adult learning and how it has changed their lives.
- A visit to RUA RED Art Gallery which is a home for all types of art. Their education program creates innovative and accessible education activities and projects for diverse audiences. The participants met with the gallery's director for a talk on their education programme.
- A visit to Tallaght Library, a state of the art library which has been very involved in the Festival in the past. The participants received a tour of the library.
- A visit to An Cosán a community education centre which bases their education programmes on creativity, imagination, encourages reflection analysis and action and which sees education as the key to social change. The participants took part in a class, conversed with students and met with staff at the centre.
- A visit to the Dublin Adult Learning Centre an adult basic education centre in Dublin's North Inner City. The centre provides individual and group tuition in reading, writing and spelling for adults. The participants attended a talk by Dr. Leo Casey, director of Learning and Teaching, on how we learn and why we learn.

This edition's inspiring learner is Joanne McCabe from Focus Ireland

My name is Joanne McCabe and I am 33 years of age. I live in the North Inner City of Dublin and was brought up on Dorset Street, Dublin. I have 5 children (one deceased) and I am the youngest of three children. I lead a busy life looking after my children and have always struggled to take care of myself.

"I had very little interest in studying and was eager to get out working"

I left school at the age of eighteen, two months before I was due to sit for the Leaving Certificate. I had very little interest in studying and was eager to get out working. It turned out that I had very little choice but to go out working and I was directed by my parents to go and earn some money.

I worked in many different settings including as a cleaner and a general operative making sausages. I also spent a couple of years working in a bar as a lounge girl. Before I returned to education I used to spend a lot of time watching television and there were many afternoons that I sat around drinking tea and talking to the neighbours about life. I had hopes of returning to education and had begun some courses but I never completed any of them for one reason or another. I was a little lazy and fearful of anything new. I did complete a parenting course with Foundations but I found it hard to commit to.

"Part of me wanted to show my kids and make them proud of me"

Around this time my keyworker from Peter McVerry Trust told me about an education service called the PETE programme in Focus Ireland where they delivered FETAC Level 3 courses and

various other programmes of support and skills. I spoke with my keyworker again and told her that I would go over and give it a try for a week. Part of me wanted to show my kids and make them proud of me for returning to education but another part of me was terrified about meeting new people in a school environment.

In January 2013 I enrolled with the PETE programme, PETE was the perfect fit for me. I loved the relaxed atmosphere. It was fun and I met loads of new people who wanted to achieve the same goals as me. I felt the staff there were involved and made my learning experience an enjoyable one. It gave me structure and routine and something that I could look forward to on a daily basis. I completed five FETAC Level 3 awards there. It was nothing like my memories of school. Over the first term I completed FETAC Level 3 courses in Self Advocacy, Computer Literacy and Health and Fitness. Self-advocacy really helped me. It was great fun, I improved my self-confidence, learned about beliefs and values and it was my first time to try public speaking. Computer Literacy assisted me in learning about the internet and internet safety which I have passed on to my children. Health and Fitness taught me about having a balance in my life with exercising and healthy eating. Over the next 2 terms I completed FETAC Level 3 courses in Kitchen and Cookery skills and Personal and Social Skills where I learned a little about self-awareness and being assertive. I was never a good cook but PETE staff made it fun to learn. I also completed a six week anger management course, attended a women's group and various health and home skills classes.



"I would love to be a keyworker in the future so I can help others achieve their hopes and goals"

"I was given the opportunity to represent Ireland at the European Anti-Poverty Network in Brussels"

Throughout this time my confidence levels were increasing and I attended various meetings with AONTAS and was given the opportunity to represent Ireland at the European Anti-Poverty Network in Brussels. I spoke in front of a large group for the first time and I applied the basic principles of public speaking and group work that I had learned in the self-advocacy class. It was nerve racking but to think that I was scared of people in 'suits' before I attended PETE. My dream for the future is to complete the FETAC Level 3 course – Career Preparation with the PETE programme and get a good curriculum vitae together. It is helping me with the interview process and preparation. I want to volunteer in the social sector and ultimately go back and study FETAC level 4 & 5 in Social Studies. I would love to be a keyworker in the future so I can help others achieve their hopes and goals. If it wasn't for people believing in me and supporting me I would not be in the position I am in today. I am one of the lucky ones and I want to give something back to those less fortunate in the future.

Are you an inspiring learner? Share your story by contacting Katie O'Rourke, Learner Support Officer, korourke@aontas.com or 01 4068220.



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