Take the first step

National literacy and numeracy awareness raising campaign

Take the first step is Ireland's campaign to support people who have difficulty with reading, writing, maths or technology to get the help they need. It is managed by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) and runs for the month of September.

Taking the first steps on any difficult journey requires courage and commitment – and for those who have difficulties with reading, writing, maths or technology, the stigma attached can prove daunting and discouraging. Often people who return to education say the hardest part was making the first call or **taking the first step** into an Adult Education Centre.

The Take the first step advertising campaign centres around four people sharing their stories through a variety of media channels. The content and message of each individual's story focused on the benefits of returning to further education. It includes national and regional radio advertising and video on demand and social media.

All the advertising encourages adults who have difficulty with reading, writing, maths or technology to contact a Freephone support line 1800 20 20 65 to get the help they need. Once they make contact the National Adult Literacy Agency will put them in contact with their local ETB Adult Education Centre or tell them about other free services that will meet their needs. See www.takethefirststep.ie for more information.

# National radio advertising – real people, real stories

Eamon:

I left school early so my reading and writing was never great…it's like a migraine for the last 16 years – at home – at work – constant – how am I going to get around this? But with the course all that changed. Now I can read to my kids. Reading bedtime stories to the kids, it means a lot to me.

Chris:

I left school I couldn't tell the time. I think I just about knew how to write my name. Because I couldn't read and write I would have lost out on a lot of jobs, good jobs. Good jobs with good money. Going back to education has opened up the world. Not a world, the world. It's like being blind and then being able to see again.
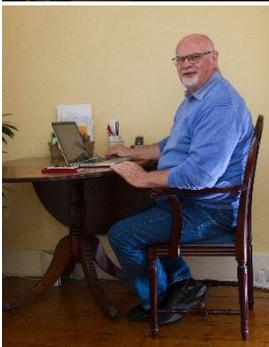
Tony:

The fear. The fear of anybody knowing that you couldn't read or write is with you constantly every minute of every day. But since doing the course the fear is gone. And it made a different person out of me altogether. I got the bug for education and learning. Sure I'm on the computer all the time now.

Gerardine:

I was never good at spelling. I could read just fine. But I would be afraid of anyone asking me do anything involving spelling. But since doing the course all that has changed. I am braver. In fact, I feel braver than ever now. You know, you're never too old to learn, never.

Each advert ends with a voiceover and call to action:

If reading, writing, maths or technology is holding you back take the first step. Freephone 1800 20 20 65 or Text LEARN to 50050 to see how we can help. This free and confidential service is supported by SOLAS, your local ETB and NALA.

How many people have literacy and numeracy difficulties in Ireland?

In the recent OECD Adult Skills Survey, the Central Statistics Office interviewed 6,000 people aged 16 – 65 in Ireland and assessed their literacy, numeracy and ability to use technology to solve problems and accomplish tasks.

The results found that almost 18% or 1 in 6 Irish adults are at or below level 1, the lowest level on a five level literacy scale. At this level a person may be unable to read basic text.

The survey shows that 25% or 1 in 4 Irish adults are at or below level 1 for numeracy. At this level a person may be unable to do a simple maths calculation, for example adding up prices.

Why do people have literacy difficulties?

There are many reasons why people have literacy and numeracy difficulties.

- Having to leave school early - missing school through illness
- Not finding learning relevant to their needs
- Being part of a large class and not having specific needs catered for
- Being in a job that did not require using literacy skills – getting out of practice

Literacy is like a muscle. You need to use it regularly or your skills weaken. Learning is a life long process. If you don't use reading and writing skills every day you can get out of practise.

Who does it affect?

It affects people of all ages and from all backgrounds. Within the one in six figure there are people who are not able to write their own name. However most adults with low literacy skills can read something but find it hard to understand official forms and instructions. Some will have left school confident about their numeracy and reading skills but find that changes in their workplace and everyday life make their skills inadequate. The literacy skills demanded by society are changing all the time.

What stops people from returning to learning?

Sometimes people are not able to see the benefits to returning to learning. They had a negative experience of school in the past and associate returning to learning with that experience.

There is also a stigma attached to low literacy and numeracy skills. Often people feel too embarrassed to return to learning and go to great extremes to hide their difficulties from their friends and family. However, this does not have to be the case. Adult education is a very different experience to school. Adult learning is all about addressing the needs of the learner, working at a pace that suits them and according to their needs and interests.

What options are there for people who wish to return to learning?

There are lots of options. You can learn in your local ETB adult education centre, study online by yourself or work with our Distance Learning Service. Everything is **free.** You decide what you want to learn, where you want to learn and when you want to learn.

If you need to find out more just call the **National Adult Literacy Agency support line 1800 20 20 65, free text LEARN to 50050** or go to www.takethefirststep.ie

Adult literacy provision in Ireland
There are currently 60,000 students in ETB (formerly VEC) Adult Literacy Services.