

# Agricultural ploughing championship. An opportunity to improve awareness

## WHO ARE WE?

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent membership organization set up by volunteers in 1980. It has been the leading campaigning and lobbying force in Ireland for adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties since it was set up.

NALA is committed to making sure that these adults can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs

## DESCRIPTION

NALA has a national Student Committee composed of volunteer literacy learners that informs and influences all NALA's work and policies. The Committee also networks with learners in local literacy schemes to hear and reflect literacy student opinions to policy makers and literacy practitioners.

The Committee wanted to be present at the National Ploughing Championship because they are aware that there are 1 in 4 adults with literacy difficulties in Ireland, not all of whom would be comfortable admitting this in a formal environment.

The student committee want to promote literacy services by explaining that:

- learning changes their lives,
- learning is always possible, even as an adult.

### MEETING POTENTIAL LEARNERS AT A NATIONAL EVENT

There is still stigma in Ireland in admitting to a literacy difficulty, so the Committee felt that by having learners run a stand at such a well-attended agricultural event, they were connecting to a hard-to-reach population in an appropriate and accessible way.

A lot of the attendees at such an event are male and from a farming/rural background, this cohort does not traditionally sign up for literacy courses, due to long working hours, lack of transport, etc., so in bringing information about services available and solutions such as the online and distance learning courses NALA organizes, the Student Committee can really reach non-traditional learners.

Members of the NALA Student Committee took a stand at Ireland's National ploughing event, which has an education section. 190,000 people attended the three days of the event. The committee members promote the work of NALA and give out information and contact details for local literacy schemes. This year we found that many adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties approached the stand themselves and spoke openly about their issues. The committee felt that this was due to the fact that learners, not staff, were manning the stand and explaining their journey back into learning.



NALA



IRELAND

Some of NALA's Student Committee members also come from rural environments. This is why if they participate in this event, they can really help to promote NALA's action by talking about their own experiences.

#### WHY ATTEND A NATIONAL PLOUGHING CHAMPIONSHIP?

Members of the NALA Student Committee were present at the NALA stand for all three days of the ploughing event. Their objectives were to inform ploughing attendees about the literacy services that are available (both 1-1 and group training) in their local Vocational Education Committees.

They are available at the stand and engage families who are attending the event to inform them about ways to encourage family literacy. They also advise family members of someone who may have a literacy difficulty on how to help that person and perhaps access support for him /her. It is also in this informal way that they can explain to members of the Irish public that anyone can have literacy and numeracy difficulties and above all, that there is a confidential and free way to address these difficulties.

Participating in an event of this scale also allows the Committee to meet politicians and the media. The Student Committee take advantage of this opportunity to draw politician's attention to the fact that funding and training is still needed for those who haven't got adequate reading, writing and numeracy skills.

NALA learners have met the President of Ireland and often serve as media spokespersons on radio and TV. Their message is that it's necessary:

- to extend the training provision and funding for people with literacy difficulties;
- to be aware of the barriers that the adults who wanted to participate in a training have to face and to take these into account

#### WHAT ARE THE LONGER TERM IMPACTS OF ATTENDANCE AT THE PLOUGHING?

NALA observed in recent years an increase in members of the public who enrol in literacy training, and many new learners say they have come after meeting students at the stand of the Student Committee in the National ploughing championship. NALA hopes to continue attending the ploughing and to support learners returning to education.

The student committee feels that is a very powerful message that it is students manning the NALA stand. They feel adults who may face similar difficulties find it easier to approach a student who can explain their pathway back into education rather than a literacy professional.

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