



# Rural Youth & Adult Literacy Trust

Literacy Tuition for Rural/Isolated Adults & Teenagers

Newsletter May 2021

## Kia Ora!

2021 is looking like an exciting year for RYALT. Here we share our reflections on our journey and let our amazing supporters know about our progress!

### Youth Literacy

Towards the end of last year, a UNICEF report stated that 35% of NZ teenagers struggle with literacy and maths. A RYALT student and staff were featured on 'The Project' regarding this: [www.adultliteracy.ac.nz/ryalt-on-the-project/](http://www.adultliteracy.ac.nz/ryalt-on-the-project/)

Why don't the schools do something about it?

In general: The schools are able to help kids with reading but they don't have the time to spend on teaching writing and the students we are dealing with have 'disengaged' from school. The number of students with low literacy is becoming overwhelming.

In Lockdown: Learning by Zoom in most schools has entailed a weekly group meeting with the teacher and reliance on written assignments left on Google Classroom. The kind of students we are helping just avoid participating and if they try to, they experience endless frustration and humiliation. They get told to read the question more carefully but they can't understand the question – no matter how many times they read it. They can't

even guess at what the teacher might mean, as some more skilled students might do.

The Youth Literacy programme is a way of preventing adult literacy problems. Most of our adult students come to us when they become parents, which is a pretty hard time of life to take on extra learning and they consistently say that they wish they had help when they are at secondary school.

### Camp and Covid

We had to cancel our live April camp for Waikato teenagers when Auckland recently went into lockdown twice. RYALT will not try to run live camps until the threat of COVID-19 has reduced internationally, as they are too expensive to run and have sabotaged at the last minute by lockdowns and the subsequent fear of group events.

## Day to Day Teenage Literacy Project

When we recently advertised offering help for day-to-day (as compared to school holiday teenage students) we were swamped. Our initial response was to try to filter out for the most needy. It went against the grain to be turning away teenagers needing help.

This urgent need in teenagers for help on a weekly basis has made us change course. We are going to put the focus of the Youth Literacy Project onto working with teenagers on a weekly basis, hopefully 3-5 times a week for half an hour, then invite them to join the school holiday programme for more intensive literacy tuition for two weeks. Therefore any recruiting for camp or the school holiday programme will be amongst our own students, which frees us up to work with all the teenage students approaching us for help.

In a way we have turned things on their head. We started off aiming to run camps and then to support the camp students between camps. Now we are aiming to support teenagers on a day-to-day basis and then to run camps or holiday programmes to provide an intensive literacy experience for them. Logistically this is easier for RYALT to manage and in terms of student experience, they get help from the time they approach RYALT.

## Which Region is RYALT Targeting?

In 2021 we will be visiting schools in South Auckland, the Far North, Waikato and the South Waikato because these are areas of high need that are close to our office. Anyone who enrolls will be helped, wherever they are from, but those are the areas we will target first.

## Adult Literacy

“Education is not filling a pail, but lighting a fire” - (attributed to W.B. Yeats)

Once again heart-felt thanks go to our wonderful volunteer coaches who work away quietly listening, observing, encouraging,



coaching their students 1-5 times a week face to face and/or by Zoom.

It's often the small things students have learned through their interactions with us that may be the sparks that set them off on a new learning path. Sometimes there's a light of understanding in a student's eyes, or they walk taller - it can happen suddenly or over time, so we may barely be aware of the difference we're making. Other student outcomes: re-enrolling in a course they'd previously dropped out of – this time with new skills and a support network, applying for that job or promotion and getting it, starting or completing an apprenticeship, reading to their children, asking the right questions in class, learning to use Zoom and even enjoying it...

“On Saturday I learned to weave a kete. Three times I had to undo it all and start over because my foundation plait wasn't tight enough, or I lost my 'ara'. Each time my teacher calmly and patiently told me to start over. I started preparing the flax at 10am and finished my kete at 10pm! On reflection, persevering with the kete has made me feel more open to learning and dealing with other challenges too.” – Joanna Hayman (Student Coach Coordinator)

This year thanks to our marketing team's efforts, we've received a rush of enquiries from parents of year 9-10 students who are struggling with reading and writing as they enter secondary school. It has been a full-on time interviewing parents and youths, recruiting and training coaches and matching students to work with coaches at times that suit them both. The reports we've received so far have been overwhelmingly positive – relief in the voices of parents and renewed enthusiasm for learning in the youngsters.

Research shows that students with even one teacher who has shown interest in them are powerfully motivated and energized in their learning. A coach working one on one with a student who is genuinely interested in the student's strengths and passions as well as supporting them with areas of difficulty can make a world of difference.

Enormous thanks to all our volunteers and supporters who enable us to make a difference in the lives of so many adults and youths, one person at a time.

## Sponsor A Student



### Sponsor A Student (SAS)

Since the Trust began, lack of financial support has been the main thing limiting what we have been able to achieve. This year, we started an initiative called Sponsor A Student. Our viewers and readers wanted to have the opportunity to help us in providing support to our students who struggle with reading and writing.

We created a post on our Facebook page on the 17th March asking for a commitment of \$5 a week to help a student. We listed what contributions would go towards – helping a student receive help and support for a term of 10 weeks, licenses for software packages, resources and tools we send out to the students and the bonus, that their contribution would increase a student's self-confidence, self-awareness and the student believing in themselves!

Rahul (marketing manager) and Miriama (community coordinator) also visited local Franklin and

Waikato businesses asking for their support and had success, with a couple of businesses signing up to sponsor a student.

It felt great to send out Certificates of Appreciation to our sponsors.



## Podcast

The good folk at Free FM, in association with Community Waikato, offered to produce a podcast for RYALT through their platform. It all started with Rahul and Miriama walking into the FreeFM offices for an interview about RYALT and our mission.

FreeFM were impressed by our initiative and gave us an amazing opportunity to spread awareness through a podcast.

The podcast will be a reflection of RYALT's journey as a not for profit organisation dedicated to providing reading and writing assistance to struggling kiwis. In addition, it's going to be a light-hearted take on how we function as an organisation and the challenges faced by us through this decade-long journey. We also have plans of including special guests, including students or others living with literacy challenges, who can help understanding by talking about their experiences.

The wonderful Miriama and Rahul are going to be the co-hosts of the show. They have been clocking some hours learning more about the ins and outs of podcast production and engaging in a studio setup.

## Thank You!

There is still a lot of work to do in terms of helping those who struggle and spreading awareness of the service. Slowly but surely!

On behalf of RYALT, Jo and the outstanding team we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our volunteers, sponsors, and supporters who continue to support us in our journey.

## Impact of Social Media

Social media has been particularly useful in sharing the message of RYALT in Aotearoa. We've been overwhelmed lately with the caring and engaged responses we have been getting from our social media network. It's great to see that RYALT's mission is being shared in community groups all around New Zealand.

You are amongst the amazing people who have been getting back to us asking about ways to contribute to this important work, understand the purpose of what we do, and also expressing interest about our sponsor a student program.

We would like to thank all you good folk for all the amazing feedback. We appreciate it immensely.