



Rural Youth & Adult Literacy Trust

Literacy Tuition for Rural/isolated Adults & Teenagers



Here's the Rural Youth and Adult Literacy Trusts (RYALT) March newsletter, packed full of interesting articles about what is happening at RYALT. We hope that you enjoy the read!

From the desk of the RYALT Board of Trustees Chairperson, Richard Winch Changes to Trustees

As our 2021 year drew to a close we were saddened to accept the resignation of Barry O'Donnell who is scaling back on his community activities. Barry had been a trustee since 2015 and had made a valuable contribution to the Trust over those years. Barry's experience in both the business and not for profit communities was invaluable and the Trust is grateful for his efforts and advice.

In our search for a replacement for Barry, we established a shortlist of three outstanding candidates with a variety of skills and experience. Consequently, we decided to appoint all three which brings the number of trustees up to 5, which the constitution allows.

We therefore would like to extend a warm welcome to:



Mereana Te Pere



Leia Sennington



Vanessa Lang

We also like to thank Vijay Satyanand, a previous trustee, who stepped in and assumed an interim role to ensure continuity while we transitioned to the new Trustee structure.

We are looking forward to fresh inputs and perspectives from our new appointees and look forward to working with them.

Richard Winch

From the desk of Jo Poland

2021 was a tough year

Let's not beat about the bush. Last year was a tough year! We lost good staff who left for a variety of reasons – to study, retire, and better jobs with better prospects - because we didn't pay enough, and they quite rightly wanted full-time work and reasonable pay, which we struggle to provide. With each departure, we lost not just a valuable person and a friend, but the human equity and the knowledge about the organisation they held. We also had a couple of false starts with good people who were not a good fit for their jobs.

We are well set up to work remotely with students, but we hadn't counted on all the other barriers that living in lockdown and mandates can create within the community of people we work with.

Things were slower because of COVID. Schools were struggling with distance teaching, and there were increasing staff shortages because of mandates etc. We worked harder than ever but had fewer students than normal - everyone was struggling, including our staff.

It is undeniable that productivity took a hit in 2021. We had to cancel two camps because of staffing issues and lockdowns and only ran one virtual camp for teenagers.

Two of our staff got a little depressed during the lockdown. Other staff were obviously on edge. Even though we are an organisation that usually works remotely, and should be able to take working from home in our stride, there were other stresses on staff – children home from school and constantly interrupting them, other family members living in close quarters, far more merging of work and home life than would typically occur, blurring of boundaries and a sense of work never-ending, because of these things.

It became customary in a meeting by Zoom to see someone walk past in a dressing gown behind a colleague or hear children screaming and see colleagues tense up as they became distracted by things happening in their background.

We made it!

And along the way, we made many other people's lives richer and happier. We heard parents telling us their son's confidence had changed, that it was not just the literacy learning that the teenager was getting, but a sense of worth, that no-one had taken an interest in the student before, that one child had no friends. Hence, the contact with the volunteer coach meant a lot—story after story about minor changes that led to significant changes in attitude and confidence.

We also heard stories about students not showing up, not practising, wasting volunteers' time. This is not unusual. Our students, both adult and youth, are not used to working at things. They tell themselves that they are dumb and useless and talk themselves out of trying – for fear of failure, which has been their constant companion in the past. There is some un-learning of bad habits and defeatism to learn before some people can knuckle down and start learning in earnest. Our coaches are so patient and are not always treated the way we would like. They all deserve a medal. If they can't get their student to be more reliable over time, they may suggest a break and move on to work with someone ready to learn. However, we also hear 'thank you for not giving up on me' from students – and that keeps us motivated!

We learned a lot which will help us in the future

RYALT is an agile organisation, and we can adapt. Out of that challenging year, we got a lot of learning. In 2021 the Sponsor a Student campaign kicked off, and we now have some regular donations coming in from a handful of generous donors. We were able to work with increased numbers of teenagers on a day to day basis, rather than in school holidays. This has proven to be a far more cost-effective way of working with youth. There are not the highs of camp, but the cost in terms of preparation and accommodation is reduced, and there is less volunteer attrition. We used to lose a lot of volunteers between camps. It is also quite hard to find volunteers who can be available full-time for a week or two weeks. Or even for two weeks twice a day for a virtual camp.

In 2022 we have introduced robust recruitment methods to ensure an excellent match to jobs when we employ. We stopped running holiday programmes. We are now offering to run free training for teacher aides to rural secondary schools because this service is urgently needed. With the sharp rise in the number of students with literacy problems, the smaller rural schools don't have enough funding to cover this.

We restructured

At the end of January, Jasmine, our first student and Volunteer Support Coordinator, left for a career change of direction. Ngareta, who was temporarily working as Youth Project Manager, went back to her study to become a clinical psychologist.

We have used the opportunity of staff leaving to restructure so that the team is more cohesive, staff are more effective, communication is better, and we can handle greater numbers of learners.

Holiday programmes and camps require triple the effort that day-to-day literacy lessons need. We are underfunded to achieve this, despite excellent efforts from the youth teams in both 2020 and 2021. The decision was made in January that these be put on hold. That enabled us to merge Ngareta's and Jasmine's jobs into one job, which will provide logistics support to staff, volunteers, and both adult and youth students. We also combined Chrissie and Tim's jobs so that we have one person dealing with both the adult and youth students. This saves a lot of duplication and eliminates an area where unnecessary time was spent on communication. Sadly, as part of this process, we made Tim redundant. We know many of the

coaches will miss his bright smile, cheery disposition and jokes. It was not an easy decision to make.

It will be early April until we have a full contingent of staff. In the meantime, we have been planning how to do things better and setting up capability in those areas, so we do more than talk about it, all within the context of a pandemic and amid uncertainty. What an amazing organisation this has become.

Jo Poland

Literacy Hubs – Are a great asset and resource for the community!



The Rural Youth and Adult Literacy Trust (RYALT) is always looking to reach out to as many people as possible to support literacy education. Although our tutoring is mainly delivered online, we are looking at ways to allow our learners to see their tutors face-to-face. Some exciting developments are in the pipeline! Hubs! With the success of our far north Kerikeri hub, we are now in the process of starting literacy hubs in South Auckland, Waikato and Hawkes Bay. These exciting developments come down to the commitment and dedication of our volunteers. Without YOU, they would not happen.

So, what is a hub, and more importantly, how do you get one started?

First up, a hub is a central point where students can meet their coaches.

Community centres, schools and libraries are great venues. Hubs can be flexible. Organisers and host venues can decide between them how they are run. Some hubs have set times when students get together as a group. Others have access to the venues when tutors and students want to get together. No matter how you want to organise the hub, it's an excellent way for coaches to connect and support each other.

Hubs don't have to be face-to-face. Nothing is set in stone yet, but our new hubs may be providing a place where students can meet their tutors online. This is great for people who don't have a computer or reliable internet at home.

Getting started is easy. We've found libraries, schools and communities are always amenable to their facilities being used for literacy learning. It's beneficial for them, and they can help get the word out in the community. RYALT's community ambassadors are crucial to getting the host venues on board and providing promotional material. That's not to say coaches can't do that too.

Once the word is out, volunteer coaches approach us. At that point, it's good for us all to meet over coffee and work out how to move things forward. It can be daunting, especially if you're new to literacy coaching, however, we offer a variety of ways to train, including a two-day training at the hub with follow-up workshops and mentoring online, so you are well prepared when the students come in.

Our Kerikeri hub has now been going since 2018. There's a great sense of community, and the students are getting a great sense of achievement. The fantastic coaches have a lot to offer, which means they cater for a wide range of learning needs. It really is learning for all!

Personally, I'm looking forward to seeing more hubs springing up in the coming months. It's good to see RYALT reaching out to more people and connecting more students and coaches. Most importantly, it shows what a fantastic team of coaches we have and what we can achieve when we work together.

Chrissie Wardle

My role as a volunteer

Volunteers are the most important component of RYALT. In this newsletter we have asked Gaby Wu, our graphics designer to give us his perspective on volunteering with RYALT.



Gaby Wu

Role: Graphic Designer

Volunteer: May 2016 - February 2022

Volunteer perspective

My role was a little but important role. It is to deliver the organisation's mission all across NZ, the adult and teens who are illiterate because of the lack of school education.

I am a quiet autistic Taiwanese man in my 30s and rarely do I initiate, however, I do respond and commit to my work when the staff need me. When I first started, it was as a website designer, but I believe RYALT had other designers and IT working on the website and chucked me into graphical design which I am good at. My work is carried out remotely, rarely do I meet in person to go to Port Waikato or they come to Hamilton.

Communicating on Slack is important to make it clear to the team what they can provide for me. And at the same time, I did my own search to understand what they are trying to deliver to the market. The sources they give me are blurbs and photos. It's much better if both mutually agree to phone call or to meet up in person.

What they have provided for me are minimal, but willing to reimburse me if I purchase software. I use my high-end spec computer oriented to video editing and gaming, but the software I use is free or low-cost software; Examples include those I obtained for free like Gimp, Inkscape and Scribus and other low-cost software like Serif Affinity Photo, Serif Affinity Designer and Serif Affinity Publisher.

Since I only get to design on call, the busiest time would be when they have a massive promotion or a newsletter quarterly. The promotional material is primary prints, as well as digital markets.

At first, I need the time to make a good design, after practising in RYALT and Extra Curriculum (including using my knowledge from Bachelor of Graphic Design) for a few months, I'm able to design on a whim, the only tools I need are the above (or what most professional designer use is Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator and Indesign). Which was no problem when they ask me on short notice. However, bear in mind, my lifestyle is simple, I'm not working full-time, and use my spare time for opportunities such as honing my skill or networking. Rarely do I say no if I can't help them, but they understand.

Overall I have gained all kinds of experience, crafting my skills, working ethically, and having good time management. Every now and then RYALT sends me a token and a thank you note, and I get to see my designs in flesh, including pen and magnet!

Six years I will never forget and look forward to seeing this organisation grow successfully.

A success story from a student

Here's a great story from Sienna, a student at RYALT.

My journey with adult literacy started by accident while reading my children's school newsletter. The advertisement to support adult literacy caught my eye. The state of the quality of my writing has been receiving very negative feedback and marked down repeatedly from my professors. To my delight, I saw the ad. I was very hopeful that help was just a phone call away. The lady receptionist seemed very surprised by my phone call and unsure they could help a university psychology major student.

Adult literacy helped me to connect with Carolyn, my tutor. We started on a journey of learning together. I was very aware that my psychology assessment subjects were challenging and varied consistently however she was amazingly supportive. I learned a variety of ways from writing sentences, layout of documents and how to paraphrase (write a sentence in my own words) and expand my vocabulary especially connecting sentences to allow my writing to flow. Carolyn's support was invaluable to me. Essentially, my last assessment was not marked down for my writing however I still have a long way to go on my writing journey.

I felt blessed to get this awesome support, next year is my final year at uni. I look forward to continue working on improving my academic writing. Thank you so much for your help and support throughout this year, especially my awesome Carolyn.

Seinna

If you have a great story to tell as a student or as a volunteer, let Chrissie or Bruce know the details of the story, all good stories go a long way to helping promote literacy and getting people motivated to help.



How to record volunteering hours

When you volunteer at the RYALT we need a record of the time that you volunteer. This is operated through our Salesforce database. A weekly text message is sent. All you have to do is reply with the volunteer time you have donated. The best way to record hours volunteered is:

- If you volunteer for 15 minutes per week, it should be recorded as .25
- If you volunteer for 45 minutes per week, it should be recorded as .75
- The full hour is recorded as 1.0
- An hour and a half would be recorded as 1.5

Think of it as parts of 100.

If you have one student, your reply should just be something like 1.0 however if you have more than one student, your reply would be 1.0, 1.5, 1.5 if you have three students. You just put a comma, between each student and reply in order of the student on the text message.

If you are a non-student volunteer, you record your volunteer hours as if for a single student. Example 4.0

Unfortunately, you are unable to reply to the text message with words. This will cause an error message.