



Rural Youth & Adult Literacy Trust

Literacy Tuition for Rural/isolated Adults & Teenagers

Tena Koutou Katoa and welcome to the first newsletter for RYALT in 2023 (and for a little while!)

Just when we thought we were glad to see the back of 2022, in blasts 2023 with a fierce storm in January then Gabrielle hit our country in February. Although our little community of Port Waikato, where our office is based, was hit hard with flooding, slips and being cut off, we feel for the East Coast residents of Wairoa, Napier and Gisborne who felt the wrath of Gabrielle especially hard.

A word from the Chairperson

Low literacy is self-isolation with no end in sight. It is not an appealing cause as people can't visualize it the way they can visualize a starving child, a battered woman or someone who has lost a limb. But it is just as crippling. Being unable to read or write well in today's world is stressful and disempowering. It closes many doors and makes a person reluctant to take part in conversations, to take risks, or, in the words of one of our students 'to be someone'. Many with low literacy have no jobs and no hope. It takes enormous courage for them to call us and start tuition as they are terrified of failing - yet again.

This year was without a doubt the worst year that the Rural Youth and Adult Literacy Trust has experienced since we started in 2011. The non-profit world breathed a sigh of relief as COVID and lockdowns died down. Although funding had been affected during that period, we were able to claim the wages subsidies and resurgence payments.

What we had not expected was that funding would remain dramatically reduced after that because some funders changed their priorities to very basic needs such as food banks, and others had fewer funds.

In 2022, we were short two (out of four) core staff members for half a year. What was achieved by the remaining two staff was incredible. Thanks to them, we enter 2023 on a better footing.

It is extremely urgent that we access better funding in 2023 so that the staff can do what they are in a position to do very well. The systems are in place. We are very well supported in terms of technology programmes, and have good computers and laptops for all staff, thanks to grants from Pub Charities.

Our hundreds of high-quality volunteers provide support to students and staff, with skills ranging across literacy coaching, document formatting, website design, graphic art, excel programming, Salesforce programming, tech support, contact centre, reception, student interviewing, coach mentoring and student liaison.

We are very grateful to those funders and donors who stood by us through the last few difficult years and ensured our survival, and with that, continued literacy support for rural isolated teens and adults.

Richard Winch

From our manager, Jo

Thankyou is an inadequate word.

Thank you to the volunteers who supported us patiently over a difficult year, and to those who stepped up to do more challenging roles and take on extra students. There are so many people I feel a debt of gratitude to, that to list them would be difficult. Every time I try to make a list, days later more people are popping into my mind.

Juggling and adapting to changing funding, and never having much certainty more than three months out – those make my job stressful and difficult at times. But that is more than outweighed by the generosity and enthusiasm of our volunteers. When Matt started at the beginning of the year I told him that one of the great things about his job is that he is talking every day to people who just want to make a difference. Enthusiastic, intelligent, caring people. It is humbling to work with you all. Thank you is indeed an inadequate word for how I feel and what you do.

Jo Poland

Where would we be without our volunteers?

A big thank you to all our volunteers who donate their time, skills and experience in helping us achieve the Trust's goals of helping rural and isolated youth and adults access our free reading and writing help. Our literacy coaches are the backbone and face of our organization, working hard each week with our students. We also have some amazing volunteers who do lots of different but equally important work in the background.

Special thanks go to:

- Stephen Stanley – our Salesforce genius.
- Survana Puthiyoppil for creating our new Slack Workflows which have made onboarding volunteers and staff on Slack effortless and comprehensive.
- Kate Seagar for creating amazing maps for doing grant applications and other uses within the organization.
- Marcus McBride for creating our shiny new website (soon to be released!)
- Emily Chin for her on- point Graphic art design of whatever we requested including new designs of Student Contact Cards, Bookmarks, onboarding procedures, and business cards.
- Lydia Richards who provides our volunteers and staff impeccable tech support.
- Andrew Griffiths who tirelessly works on our Database.
- May Horn who helps with formatting when we need it.
- Kirrily Denny who is our Community Ambassador for Whangamata and has generated many new referrals for our services through promoting RYALT tirelessly in her community.
- Jane Jones for being our friendly and reliable e-receptionist, taking enquiries via our 0800 number.
- Kieran Sinclair for his hard work and commitment with the Outbound Calling Lists in the Contact Centre since he started last year.
- Kathleen Dobson who is our fabulous editor keeping newsletters looking sharp.
- Angie Lee for her Wiki work.
- Our local office volunteers, - Maggie Day, Joy Milne and Helen Teneti who come into the office every week and help organise our information Mail outs to organisations.

Funding Update

We have great staff, many wonderful and dedicated volunteers, strong interest from potential students, software and volunteers to develop and improve the Coach Training, which we can then share with other organisations, a detailed operational plan, and systems of marketing which work for attracting rural teenagers and adults with low literacy who want help. Our biggest problem is low staffing in essential roles caused by low funding for wages and operating costs.

Low staffing in 2022 meant there was less time to apply for grants. During 2022, plans were developed to start a social enterprise to mitigate funding shortfalls, but that was delayed because of the staff shortage.

We are very grateful to those funders and donors who stood by us through the last few difficult years and ensured our survival and continued literacy support for rural isolated teens and adults.

Implementation of the social enterprise has started in 2023. Saravana Perumal, who has already helped us with Moodle, is working on that. Once it is in place, it will need to produce enough to pay a dedicated administrator, so that our stretched staff can focus on core business.

Last year....

In the second half of last year, much of the marketing for new students was reduced in order to continue support to current students and coaches, including the onboarding of those already in the system. No one was turned away, however. The numbers indicate that we would have met our goals if we had had a full staff. We are proud that the strategies we put in place enabled us to keep serving students and to introduce better systems.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATES

Wiki (RYALT Cloud)

Every coach should be given a login to the wiki, our library of online resources. It can be found at: https://mediawiki.adultliteracy.ac.nz/index.php?title=Main_Page

The wiki has many resources for volunteer coaches but navigation around the wiki needs to be improved. Volunteer Angie Lee and her team have continued Farrah Chavez' work on the wikied are making the search function work better. Farrah provided great tools for us, but even so, this next step cannot be rushed and requires careful analytical people.

If you love technology and wikis, please let us know, as Angie could do with help. It's a huge job.

Moodle and the Coach Training

We sincerely apologise for the ongoing delay in updating the online training, which had to be put on hold last year while we were short-staffed.

Feedback on the training content is great, but working through the materials is a challenge. For this reason, we have volunteer Training Supporters.

When we update the training, we will also shift to 'Moodle', a learning software platform that is similar to Thinkific, but with fewer limits because of it has an open licence software.

The site can become active once staff add materials. Now that we are fully staffed, work on this will progress again.

Slack Workflows

Workflows and other systems are being implemented to stop people falling through the cracks and increase efficiency. Work on this started last year and has recently been completed. Workflows in Slack will walk new volunteers through the orientation process.

We are already finding that the workflows, created by volunteer Suvarna Puthiyoppil, help volunteers have a positive experience and find their way around more easily

Online Membership Forms

This is a work in progress. We are aiming for a membership form that feeds data straight into our Salesforce database so that staff and volunteers don't have to re-enter that information. Stephen Stanley, who has helped us create systems to capture the required data, is also helping with this.

Introducing our new Staff Members!



Hi, my name is Matthew. I am the new Student Coach Coordinator. I have been working in the primary education sector for more than 20 years now, and I am amazed at how quickly time has passed. I have lived in the Franklin district for more than a decade, but before that, I used to travel around the country, exploring different towns and cities and enjoying the beauty of New Zealand. Over the years, I have seen many individuals in need of support in their learning journey, but they either lack the knowledge of where to seek assistance or lack the confidence to take the next step. Therefore, I appreciate the essential services that RYALT is offering to the community.

Tena koutou katoa! My name is Nikayla and I am the new Support Coordinator for RYALT. I recently finished my Bachelor of Applied Social Work and will be graduating in May. I have taken on many roles and built a network of contacts which will help me in my work with the literacy community. Outside of work, I run my own small business 'Nippies Edible Art', and I appreciate the simple things in life. Living close to work also gives me the freedom and time to enjoy the wonderful things our country has to offer. I am passionate about working with adults, youth and their families, and I am delighted to be part of the RYALT family. I am looking forward to learning, developing and contributing to the literacy community.



Delivering for Good - NZ Post

In June 2022, we were lucky enough to be one of the chosen charities to benefit from the NZ Post for their community initiative, Delivering for Good, which provides free courier services for a whole year.

The savings the Trust has made with the Delivering for Good programme has been invaluable plus we have had the capability of mailing out to multiple organisations more frequently, sending devices and learning material to students and coaches, and marketing material to ambassadors to distribute to their communities.

We look forward to reapplying this year and hopefully will be successful again. Keep an eye out on our social media for the call for support!

Youth Literacy Levels in New Zealand

An article penned by our volunteer Olivia Jayne Welsh

The debate in recent years surrounding youth literacy levels in New Zealand has truly exposed the crisis concerning this, garnering media attention from multiple news outlets and organisations including the NZ Herald, and The Education Hub, a non-profit advocating for an improvement in education.

In March of 2022, the NZ Herald covered the debate, exposing the disadvantages that students currently face, and statistics regarding the low reading and writing skills of New Zealand's youth.

This article revealed that nearly one in every five 15-year-olds is not meeting minimum reading standards. These kinds of statistical revelations shed a light on the problems for youth and their inability to keep up. There are multiple factors contributing to this, including insufficient content in the curriculum, and underfunded support for children with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. It's important when addressing a topic that generates such strong emotional reactions to, include input from affected children, who cannot read or write at an appropriate level, and the frustrated and concerned parents, and teachers.

Further studies highlight that a multitude of factors, including insufficient funding, inadequate expertise and working with disadvantaged students affect this. The Education Hub published two research reports that state that only 21% of 15-year-olds are at the basic levels of literacy. This is critical because students lack the confidence and necessary skills to be successful in the future. Further action has to be taken, considering societal factors as a reason for this set-back in education.

The Education Hub calls it a "national crisis".

Olivia Jayne Welsh - February 2023

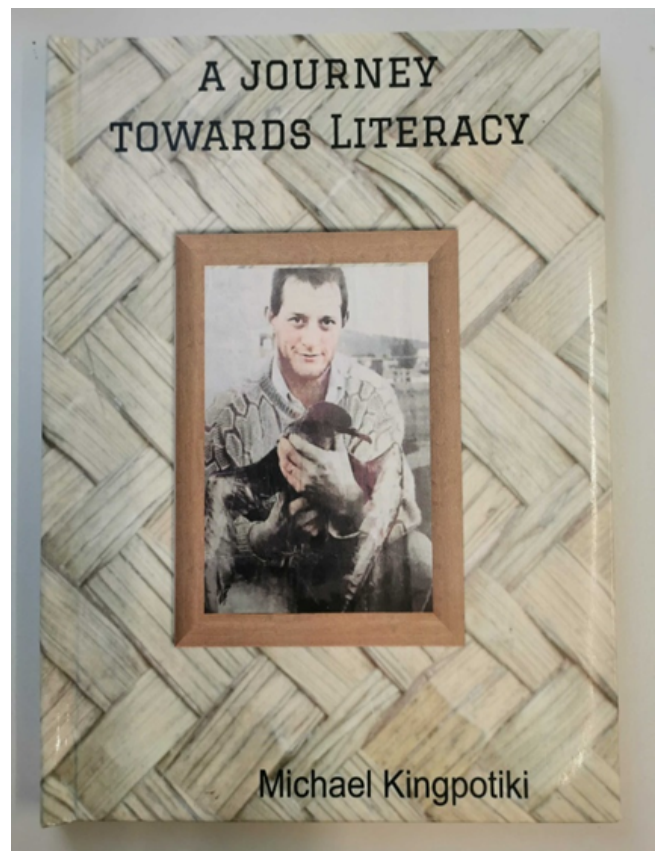
A Journey Towards Literacy

When Michael's book arrived at the office, the staff were very excited to see the finished product of months of hard work and dedication by both Michael and his coach Linda Davies. To say we were moved by Michael's obvious hard work and progress would be putting it lightly. It was humbling to read about his struggles growing up not being able to read and write, how it made him feel, and how he had to adapt throughout his life.

When Michael first approached RYALT for help, his initial goal was to be able to read to his grandchildren. Now he has not only been able to improve his reading but he has published his own first book of stories about his life and experiences.

Michael's dedication to continuing his learning journey with Linda is impressive and shows how important it is to have a supportive coach who can guide and encourage us to reach our goals. It's inspiring to see how Michael has not only improved his reading and writing skills but has also found a passion for storytelling and writing.

The fact that work on a second book is already under way is a testament to Michael's commitment to his craft and his determination to keep pushing himself to achieve more. It's exciting to think about what new stories and experiences he will share in his next book, and it's clear that his journey will continue to inspire others.



An excerpt from the book:

Introduction

I have been learning to read for the past 2 years, I am 59 years old. It's been hard for me I can only imagine how things could have been different if I had been able to read and write. It wasn't too bad when I was on my own and had no commitments only my employers. When I got married it was amazing, but having kids was tough because I knew that one day my children would want me to read to them. I was ashamed, knowing that I couldn't and I thought I wasn't good enough for my kids. I didn't make much money when the kids were growing up, I felt disappointed in myself because we had no money. It was tough on the kids, especially at Christmas time when I was working on the farm, the boss's kids got motorbikes and lots of toys and our kids didn't get much. I felt I let my wife and kids down because I couldn't read. If I could have been able to read and write, I would have been able to get a better job and my wife and kids would have been proud of me. I worked hard to get a pay rise, but I never asked for one, and I have never been fired from any job. I think sometimes my kids were embarrassed knowing that their father could not read. I am writing my story to tell my whanau that **it is never too** late to learn. I'm sharing my memories of some of the things I have got up to in my life.

Personal Shame

When I was growing up, I always thought I was different by the way people treated me. I couldn't explain how I felt. I knew the words but I just couldn't say them because of my speech.

I didn't understand why people treated me differently. The way my family and friends treated me made me feel I was dumb. To this day I still feel the same way! People look at me when I tell them I can't read; it makes me feel ashamed. It was years before I told my best friend that I couldn't read, he went very quiet towards me. When I told my kids that I couldn't read I felt embarrassed for them because their father could not read to them.

How to get involved

As reported by our Chairperson and Manager, we urgently require support to keep the Trust operating so we can provide free reading and writing coaching to youth and adults with low literacy levels who are isolated or live in rural areas.

We rely on the generous support of members of our community who contribute through volunteering, donations and fundraising.

Here are some ways you can show your support for the **Rural Youth and Adult Literacy Trust**.

1. Volunteer: One way to support the trust is by volunteering your time and skills. You may be able to assist with coaching, fundraising, marketing, or other tasks that may be needed. Contact the trust to learn more about available volunteer opportunities.
2. Donate: Donations are always appreciated and can be made in a variety of ways, such as one-time donations, weekly donations like our Sponsor a Student, or through corporate sponsorships. Even small donations can make a big difference in helping the trust continue to provide its much-needed services.
3. Fundraise: Organize a fundraising event or activity to support the trust. This could include a book sale, charity walk, auction, or any other creative idea that can raise awareness and funds for the trust.
4. Spread the word: Help raise awareness of the trust and its mission by sharing information about its services and activities on social media, through word of mouth, or by distributing flyers and other promotional materials.

Give a little <https://givealittle.co.nz/org/adultliteracy>

Make a donation <https://www.adultliteracy.ac.nz/make-donation/>

Sponsor a Student <https://www.adultliteracy.ac.nz/donate-sponsor/>

Become a Friend of RYALT <https://www.adultliteracy.ac.nz/become-a-friend/>

Donate your old device for a student <https://www.adultliteracy.ac.nz/donate-device/>

Become a Community Ambassador for your local area - email lillian@adultliteracy.ac.nz

Leave a Bequest for RYALT

Volunteer- email admin@adultliteracy.ac.nz

Know someone who owns a business? Ask them if they would consider making an in-kind donation of products or services to RYALT to auction for fundraising.

By showing your support for the Rural Youth and Adult Literacy Trust, you can help make a difference in the lives of those who struggle with low literacy levels, and help them to achieve their full potential.

Back Cover of “A Journey towards Literacy” showing the distance between Linda (Coach) and Michael but are able connect via Google Meet to do the lessons.

