

# Family Literacy Practice in ETBs

Guidelines, Case studies  
and Recommendations





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2020



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# List of acronyms

AEO	Adult Education Officer	HIQA	Health Information Quality Authority
ALO	Adult Literacy Organiser	HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
CFL	Clare Family Learning	HSE	Health Service Executive
CPD	Continuing Professional Development	ITABE	Intensive Tuition in Adult Basic Education
CYPSC	Children and Young People's Services Committee	KCETB	Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board
DEASP	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection	LCETB	Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
DEIS	Delivering Equality in Schools	MABS	Money Advice and Budgeting Service
DES	Department of Education and Skills	NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
DSP	Department of Social Protection (now the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection)	PLSS	Programme Learner Support System
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education	QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
ESF	European Social Fund	SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages	SOLAS	An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna/ Further Education and Training Authority
ETB	Education and Training Board	VEC	Vocational Education Committee
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland	VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
EU	European Union	W/WETB	Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board
FET	Further Education and Training		
FETCH	Further Education and Training Course Hub		

# Acknowledgements

SOLAS and ETBI would like to acknowledge the immense work that went into the production of these guidelines, case studies and recommendations on family literacy.

First and foremost, our sincere thanks to the many family literacy learners who spoke with such honesty and passion on the benefits of family literacy to their lives and those of their families and communities.

A particular thank you to Dr Maggie Feeley and Dr Ann Hegarty without whom such rich evidence of good practice across ETBs might not have been unearthed to the extent that it was. The rigorous and carefully presented research in the wider background report accompanying this publication will inform the development of family literacy in further education and training for many years to come.

To our partners at NALA for, as always, overseeing each part of the research process with great care and assuredness.

To all of our Advisory Group members<sup>1</sup> for their careful reading, respectful feedback and valued insights at all stages of the project.

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1 The National Literacy, Numeracy and Basic Skills Network acted as the Advisory Group for this project. This network is a sub group of the ETBI FET Directors forum.



# Foreword

It is with great pleasure we present these guidelines, case studies and recommendations on family literacy in ETBs.

This is the first time family literacy practices in ETBs have been researched at a national level and the research findings highlight the impressive and creative approaches to family literacy across ETBs.

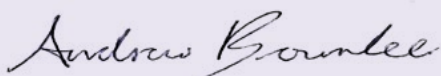
The Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 called for literacy provision for personal, family, social and community contexts including non-accredited group provision with emphasis on the recruitment of specific priority target groups. Supporting literacy and numeracy – including family literacy – remains a firm commitment in the Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024.

These guidelines, case studies and recommendations on family literacy in ETBs arise from the substantial and rigorous background research carried out by Dr Maggie Feeley and Dr Ann Hegarty - with the support of NALA - on behalf of SOLAS and ETBI. The background research report entitled '**Enabling Intergenerational Learning – background report on family literacy practices in Education and Training Boards**' is published alongside this shorter report and provides greater detail on the research findings that form the basis of the guidelines and recommendations presented here.

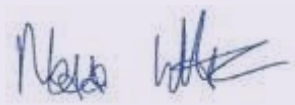
Both reports reveal the immense commitment and skill of all involved in family literacy and also the need to support this extremely valuable aspect of further education and training into the future. Readers will be heartened to hear the voices of so many learners who have found a way to reclaim their strengths through family literacy. Not only does family literacy support access to richer educational experiences for children and their parents, it also opens so many other opportunities in further education and training – for the learners involved and also for their communities.

These guidelines, case studies and recommendations highlight the extremely valuable work being carried out across ETBs, while also emphasising the need to safeguard supportive and relational approaches to family literacy into the future.

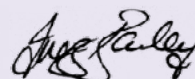
It is hoped that the publication of the guidelines in this shorter report will aid their day to day use across ETBs.



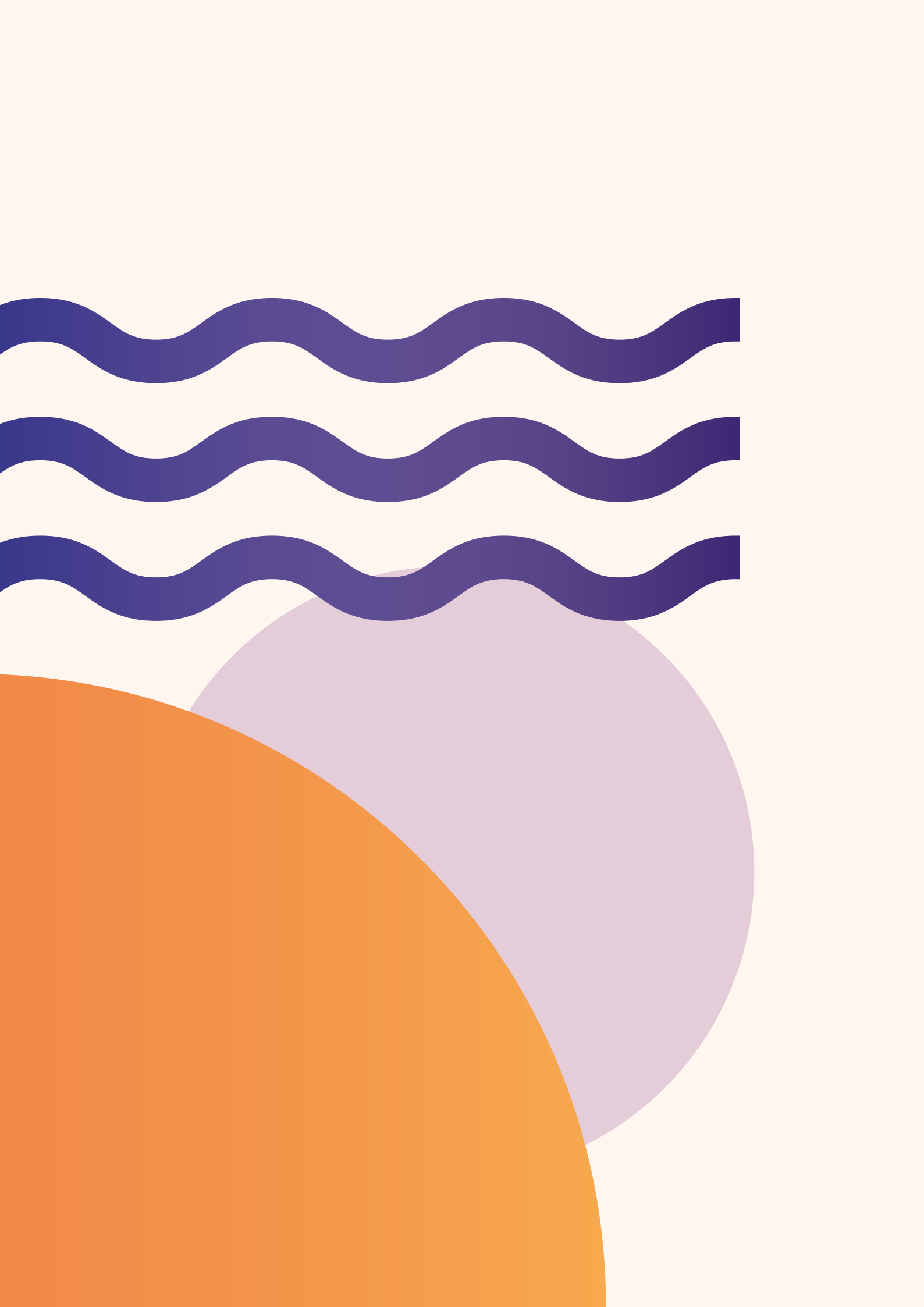
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# Background

Between September 2018 and February 2019 a research project was conducted to map the provision of family literacy across all sixteen ETBs. The aim of the research project was to provide further education and training stakeholders with a contemporary picture of family literacy activity in ETBs against a backdrop of the *Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019* and wider related government policy.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, this project intended to elicit good practice models from current family literacy activities in order to devise a set of practical guidelines that would assist future development of family literacy policy and practice within the FET sector. This comprehensive background report includes a detailed national and international context for family literacy practice, a survey of family literacy provision in all sixteen Education Training Boards (ETBs), three case studies of family literacy in practice, and good practice guidelines for family literacy in the further education and training (FET) sector.

## About this report

This report is a shorter version of the background research conducted by Dr Maggie Feeley and Dr Ann Hegarty. The background research is published in tandem with this shorter report and will be a resource for personnel in ETBs who wish to read further into the international literature underpinning the guidelines and case studies or who are curious to learn more about the research methodology undertaken.

It is envisaged that this shorter report – containing as it does, the guidelines for good practice in family literacy and detailed case studies of good practice and recommendations for the sector – will help guide and shape practice and policy relating to family literacy in ETBs over the coming years and will assist ETBs in developing local family literacy strategies.

1. **Section 1** provides an overview of insights from learners and staff across ETBs on the benefits and challenges of family literacy.
2. **Section 2** contains good practice guidelines for family literacy provision.
3. **Section 3** presents details of the survey carried out in ETBs, and the three case studies conducted in Kilkenny and Carlow ETB (KCETB), Limerick and Clare ETB (LCETB), and Waterford and Wexford ETB (W/WETB).
4. **Section 4** details key recommendations for the sector to consider.
5. **Appendices** provide additional detail on the background research undertaken by Dr Maggie Feeley and Dr Ann Hegarty.

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2 SOLAS, 'Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019' (2014). Hereafter abbreviated to the 'FET Strategy'.

## What family literacy learners say



### It's for my children

*I would do a course for my children before I would do one for myself. I'm at the bottom of a long list, so it's a good way to get mums and dads back to education. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

*I know a mum and she does night shifts, and she's here in the morning for classes because she thinks it's important to link with the school and to know what's happening for her kid. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

*I have two daughters in the school, and I get good support here. When my girls see me involved here in the school, they know I'm there and they like that ... they get to see me and know what I'm doing and it's a nice certainty for them, it's reassuring for them. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

*I have two children here and they love school. The classes here are great for me, and there is something different to go to each term. They really try to involve the parents, and it has a good impact on my kids to see me here. I tell them that they go to school to learn and to be good human beings and to learn values ... parents are the first teachers, but the teachers are there to reinforce those. I tell them I am going to school to learn too and to do new things and that's important and I tell them there is no age to stop learning. I tell them you have to keep learning because it's a new world every day and I want to make sure they are reading and thinking and I want to be a good example to them in that. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

*I brought my daughter to lots of events here too, and it got her used to the school and I found that very helpful. And, on her first day of school, she was just so used to everything ... You really need to be grounded for your kids, you know? If you're not it's just chaos. Last year, we had a giant game of snakes and ladders here for Maths for fun ... everyone was learning but it was so much fun!*

**ETB Family Literacy Learner**

### It's for myself and my family

*Not all parents know what to do ... we did a course here called Parents Plus, and I got so much out of that. It was a big commitment, it was three months, and we got all the books to go with it ... and I still look back at those. It was about disciplining your child in a positive way. I learned strategies that have helped me as a parent ... like sitting down with him and giving him individual time, instead of saying 'There's the television, I have to go and do the dinner' where now I can say to myself that can wait, the dishes can wait. Sitting at the table and giving your child that time is important ... twenty minutes of reading with him or making a jigsaw or that. That's what they want and you can build from that. I am his primary carer, and it is a lot of work on a mum's shoulders. But, the course was great, and I got a lot out of it for myself. I understood him more, and we're building on that relationship and we're growing as a family. I've been saying to other mums 'You missed that class last week. It was great. Why don't you come back next week?' **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

*I didn't do the Leaving Cert 'cause I struggled with numeracy, and I have two children ... and I thought it was important to study maths, because it meant I could help them with their homework. I went on to study communications and that helped with English as well. We did spellings and form filling which was great, and I did computers as well. At the moment, I am studying self-advocacy and computers and personal care. I'm here 3 years now. I was very nervous the first time I came because it had been so long since I was in education. What I liked about coming was it fitted in with the school hours, and the tutors are great at giving assistance if you are stuck at anything. We start at 9.30 and I'm finished at 1.00 o'clock. I drop the kids to school first and then I go to school. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

*My eldest son has dyslexia, and I find I'm more able to help him with spellings and reading now. Before they'd be afraid to ask me questions at home, but now they do. They see I can help. I find too I'm more confident speaking to the school teachers. I can ask questions now that I wouldn't have before. I can stand up for my children, and I can find out now what they are entitled to from the education system. My kids are so proud of me for coming back. They're chuffed, sometimes I hear them say 'Oh my mum's in college', you know and that's nice for me to hear. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***



## My learning doesn't stop here...

*I have no idea yet what I'm going to do next, but I have found the courses in the school are stepping stones for us. And it's important to have those there for mothers. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

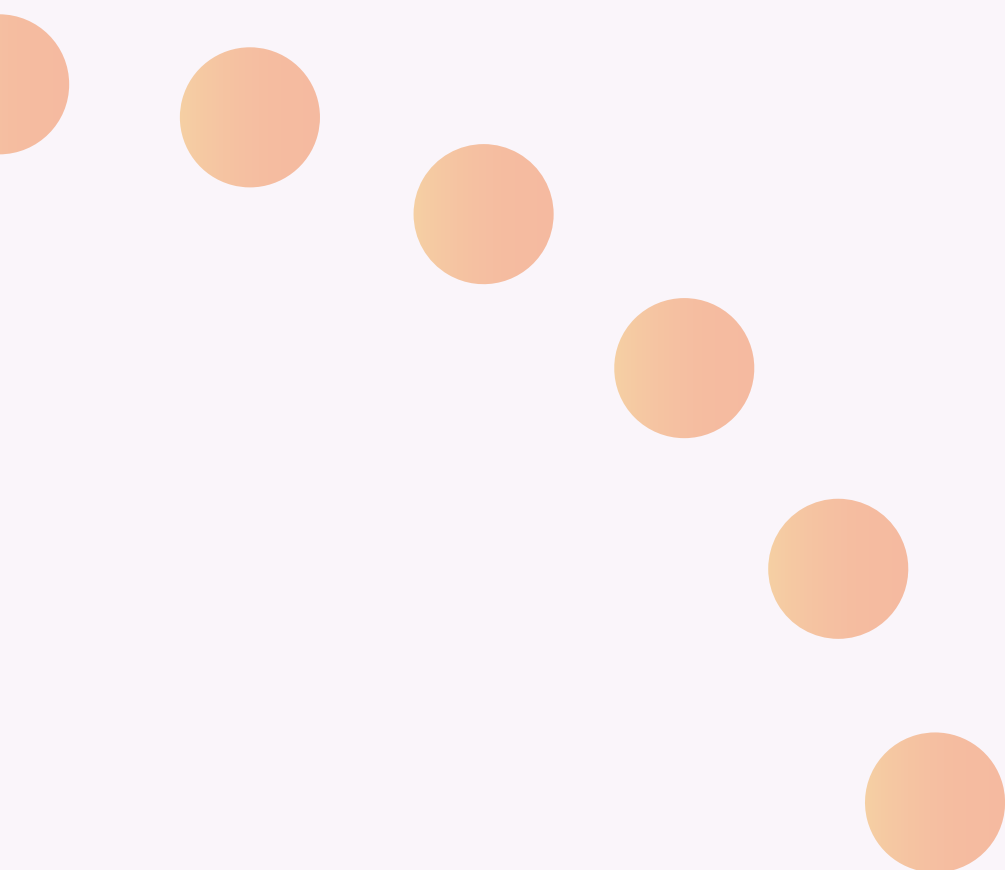
*I do want to go back to work. That's the next stage for me, and I'm looking into doing a course with SOLAS now. With the new hospital opening, there will be work for administrators. From being here, I find I want to learn more, obviously, to help my kid but also for me so I can advance. I want to get out there, to get back into the classroom again and to do it. It's another step forward. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

*I want to go back to work now. Something like this has really helped my language development, and I have also learned a lot about what other courses are available for me in the local community. Talking to other people has really helped me to know what is going on. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

*I'd love to go to college and just do something and just feel, yeah, I've achieved something. But, I mean, come the end of this course anyway I will talk to somebody and say look it, I want to do something else now, and they'll help me decide. Yeah, from doing nothing, sitting feeling useless. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

*I can sit and do his homework with him now and I can do his reading and writing and I'm learning with him. Even on the bus now we are reading the signs together. I say to him how important it is for him to read. I say to him you want to be able to go into your computer and use it, and you need to be able to read to do that. I tell him learning is for the rest of his life and that he'll always be learning. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***





# What the research tells us about family learning in ETBs

In the six months between September 2018 and February 2019, the researchers gathered comprehensive evidence that further education and training (FET) family literacy activities have a significant and positive impact on adult learners and their families.

## How family literacy is conceptualised

### Family literacy is socially-situated literacy in action

Family literacy and integrated family learning are part of the same learning continuum. In family literacy, the basic skills are integrated into a host of topics that allow adult learners to re-engage with learning and, thereby, enable them to better support their children's experience of schooling.

### Literacy is viewed through an equality perspective

Barriers and solutions to good practice in family literacy sit within a framework that focuses on the four overarching and interconnected elements of equality:

1. resource,
2. cultural,
3. relational, and
4. systemic.

Like other studies consulted, research shows that family literacy clearly contributes to widening participation in lifelong learning (Carpentieri, 2011; NIACE, 2013a) and data from the research conducted with ETBs suggest the same. Parents repeatedly state that they are prepared to engage in learning for their children rather than for their own immediate learning needs and that they are concerned for their children's future well-being and prepared to face their own demons about education to help their children's life chances.

Schools have seen their culture change to better embrace the role of parents as co-facilitators of their children's learning development.

## Local family literacy strategies

Making family literacy development a more focused position was suggested by every ETB. They felt that the development of vital connections with stakeholders needed to be held by one or two people who would lead, and be accountable for, family literacy in an ETB area. Coordination would include recognition that beyond the ETB, family literacy is part of pre-school, school, library and community areas of interest and common ground can usefully be established and collaboratively developed.

## Wider benefits

The evidence gathered is that family literacy activities are effective in engaging adult learners and contributing to the raising of literacy skills levels across generations. Mental health and well-being are also enhanced by participation in adult learning.

## How family literacy is delivered

### Excellent provision and more support needed

The research concluded that there is excellent family literacy activity in the FET sector, and that it would benefit from additional resources and a more formal structure. Providers reported a lack of financial and human resources to reach the numbers of pre-schools, schools and families who would benefit from family literacy provision. The coordination of family literacy is most often part of the wider adult literacy responsibility of one or more ALOs or project workers.

## Optional accreditation

It was clear from the research that participants believed accreditation should remain optional, especially for those engaged in family learning in schools where children were also participants. QQI components were not thought to capture the very context specific skills that parents acquire, including their facilitation role in children's learning and their often significant contribution to the school community. One-off and short-family literacy activities were not considered appropriate for accreditation.

## Training opportunities

Training of family literacy tutors takes place in Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) and in Clare Family Learning. Practitioners found these sessions to be beneficial, as were NALA family literacy conferences (annual). These conferences allow for networking across ETBs and with HSCL teachers and others.



Not all tutors were trained. This was due to factors such as:

- their part-time status,
- their availability for CPD, and
- the question of who bore the costs of training for those not in full-time employment.

Other training was suggested to enhance understanding amongst the different education sectors that collaborate on family literacy. In fact, considerable opportunities exist in collaborative partnerships for structured, as well as informal, cross-organisational learning. School personnel would find it useful to take part in **both awareness training** about adult literacy and **adult education approaches**. Family literacy staff would equally benefit from awareness training about the **school curriculum**.

Collaboration would be enriched by these cultural exchanges. However, building collaborative partnerships in most ETBs is currently left to chance. Resourcing awareness training would enable tighter strategic planning and more culturally aware cooperation in delivering on a negotiated joint strategy.

## How family literacy can be strengthened and sustained

### Wide and sustained collaboration locally

Research participants reported that collaborative partnerships between FET providers, DEIS schools and HSCL teachers were the basis of good family literacy provision. In addition, public libraries and Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) have common objectives with education providers in that they offer rural and community literacy development and assistance for children, young people and their families that are in need of multiagency supports. These four partners, led by the ETB, could form a core local family literacy group that audits community need and develops a family literacy strategy. Other agencies could be co-opted as required, and their local networks with parents in need will increase the reach of the core group without the partnership becoming too unwieldy.

### Supporting skilled tutors

Skilled family literacy tutors were essential to the development and delivery of programmes, but there was concern at the lack of security in employment status for many tutors. It is hoped that the availability of reliable data about tutor hours and enrolment figures will assist in the human resource decisions in the future.

Tutor availability was a challenge for those coordinating provision. They struggled at times to find an appropriate tutor for a short course. Part-time staff inevitably favoured longer courses as these gave a greater job security.

## Better data will lead to better decision-making

Obtaining precise data has been limited by the absence of separate classification for family literacy on the PLSS data system. Family Literacy is now a primary target group on the PLSS and over time full family literacy data should become available. Data-based decisions about the delivery and outcomes of family literacy will be a significant change to the current *ad hoc* situation. It is vital that clear measurement is used to improve monitoring, evaluation and implementation of family literacy. A reductive focus on quantitative administrative data is unhelpful.

Robust data should allow the complexity of family literacy interventions to be more clearly understood. Accurate measurements should enable appropriate resourcing, and this should – as all ETBs indicated – allow growth in family literacy provision.

## Evidence from family literacy experts in ETBs

The research undertaken by Dr Maggie Feeley and Dr Ann Hegarty unearthed a wealth of **evidence** about a full range of aspects of family learning activities. In the larger background report that accompanies this shorter report, this evidence is explored in great detail under the following headings:

- engagement (including recruitment and retention),
- programme delivery,
- outcomes (including accreditation), and
- progression (including to further training and employment).

Below is a flavour of what family literacy staff in ETBs had to say on the important work of engagement, programme delivery, outcomes and progression.

### Engagement

#### Family literacy takes time and patience

*We had a woman once who came to live here, and ... she couldn't even write her name. When I copped it, I got her in for cookery then for sewing. Basically, she did four classes that had no literacy and then she felt encouraged to do a computer class. And it was after that that she admitted her literacy issues and now she has continued on to the ETB and her child is in third class, and she can do his reading with him. Before that, he was going to all the homework clubs. That was a real good-luck story. She had to take a lot of courses and there were a lot of home visits to get her there. But she did get there, and she's so proud now to be able to teach her children; and they are so proud to see her there in the classroom. It really takes a lot of time*



to build up those relationships. It takes time and trust for them to say they have issues with reading and writing. They might first say they can't help with the homework but they won't say it directly. **HSCL Teacher**

And, I think it's just getting parents in the very first day, because it's a daunting first day of not knowing. And then, normally, once people get in the first day, they'll continue to come. It's just at the start. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

## Parents do it for their children

And, as well, then people don't have any problem coming in to learn something that's going to help them help their children. So, it's kind of ... there's more motivation than anything. **ETB AEO**

I think most parents will do anything for their children and their very reluctance then to focus on themselves ... And the parent then can see, oh, I really enjoyed this, and then move on to other things. And I think that's the importance of family learning. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

## Raising and maintaining awareness

So, you might do up little flyers and ask them just to hand them out to kids, and the kids take them home in the schoolbags. But it would be flyers or posters, things like that, ... The GPs' surgeries, we would go to all those kinds of places in the area. **ETB ALO**

I encourage the schools to have open days. And, if they have an open day, then I'll be there ... But then, you know, we stay around for a cup of tea and then anyone who wants to come over to me then when we're just having tea and whatever will chat away. **ETB ALO**

## Family literacy needs collaborative approaches

I think it can't be a one-man show or a one-organisation show. It has to be a multiple approach. I've noticed that when we advertise something ourselves we may not always get a full class. But, this time we sold it to everyone. So Tusla has bought into it. The public health nurses have bought into it ... and they are also involved in recruiting and transmitting this information, sending people along ... **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

The whole barrier of going in the door, whether it's a centre or a school, ... because there are many people that maybe had a very bad experience of education and maybe felt the system failed them as well. So like to actually bridge that barrier is probably - you know, but that's where maybe the agencies and the other bodies can really help us. **ETB ALO**

I think the main source of help with recruitment would be the home-school liaisons because I suppose they're the ones who are in contact with the school. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

.. I have actually learned so much from working with home-school teachers around children's curriculum and what parents need to know... **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

We had a home-school person and she had two schools in my area and she was just fantastically into meeting the parents and the open, you know—meeting the junior infant parents in June before the schools closed... And I used to go down to that... And, again she would have a couple of us kind of saying what we do in the area. And we got that opportunity. **ETB ALO**

Engagement is the first major step in having choices about becoming a part of this growing culture of partnership between parents and schools.

## Delivery

### Principles of adult learning

The flexibility of the FL model is its key feature in my view. That ALOs can offer such a range of programmes is fantastic, and I have seen it work very well as a recruitment ground for other mainstream literacy programmes, and a hotbed of word-of-mouth advertising for the literacy service. **ETB ALO**

### Literacy and learning

So I think that for some people and maybe for me up until maybe a couple of years ago that the notion of losing literacy, as a term, would be a scary prospect. But it's not as much anymore because I don't think literacy should be a standalone - I think it should be integrated - into other things, which would take away with the stigma and we would deal with every person who walks in and work with them at their level. **ETB ALO**

Like, what value is it for the parents if they're not actually addressing their own literacy, addressing the issue of how to help their child's literacy, addressing the understanding of what family learning means? Understanding what it is for a child to read a book, understanding that you can have a six-month-old with a book and that's actually okay, and it's not stupid or ridiculous like that, it's actually turning the page and ... or how to talk to your child about a book. That's all really important. **ETB AEO**

## Learning is always social

*... so that the people who come get to know each other, so there's nice social environment. They're chatting away, and, also they're completely engaged with what I'm doing. So, they get fun out of that too. So there's double, you know, benefit of them coming there. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

*I see parents and children getting to learn a little more about each other - you know, things that they didn't know before. So, that element of novelty of finding out some new aspect about the child, or vice versa - the child finding out about the father ... And I think it's again a sense of feeling good about yourself when your son says: 'Dad, I didn't know you could paint'; 'Dad, I didn't know you could make this so well'. You know? So that sense of feeling good about that would make them to come back. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

## Creative approaches

*So, when I work with parents, you know, most of our family learning, a lot of it I do is I talk to them - I work with them first as parental groups and then we go work with the children. So when I work with them I try and point out to them where the literacy element is. I don't start with that. But as I'm talking to them, as they're doing things, you know, I say, 'And when you focus on this what do you notice happening?' And they say, 'oh, yeah, we're talking about numbers, we're talking about words, we're talking about spelling, and these kinds of things, distances and measures and stuff'. So they're unconsciously doing it. We're doing it and then when we point it out to them I think it has a greater impact because then they feel, ah, I've been doing it already. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

## Digital literacy and family learning

*So I suppose that's why we set up the basic computers class - to get the parents set up on the App and to learn basic IT skills so that they could be more in tune. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

## Early intervention

*I suppose it really made me realise that when we're going into schools, sometimes we're getting at it too late, you know? And to be able to identify it at that stage, before they're in school, before they have homework, it just made it a little bit easier and less stressful for them, I suppose. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

## Outcomes

### Lifelong learning

*It encourages parents to be more proactive with their children's education and to be more involved in what they're doing. And I think that has a long-term impact. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

*And then the other thing that strongly I noticed was the connection with the children. There was a lot of the times the parents wouldn't know what the children were capable of and then the child wouldn't know what their fathers were capable of or their mothers were capable of and so I could see their surprise. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

*And she loves school now, and I think I have given her more interest in it. She doesn't miss a day. I'm trying to encourage her. I left school very young, and it's now that I'm regretting it so I don't want her to feel that ... I want her to see the good side. **ETB Family Literacy Learner***

### Active participants in learning

*Well, they're just taking control of it then. They're going, 'I'm going to just do another one [sum] now just to practice again, you know. I know I have it right now; I just want to practice again, you know.' And that sharing - even that attitude at home it just makes a difference. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor***

*But also with the maths I think, you know, it's the fear element. I mean, lots of people say, 'Oh, I'm no good at maths' and that kind of rubs off on their kids, because they don't want to try things then. So at least if they have that confidence it just means that, you know, they'll give it a go, they'll try it, and it'll rub off on their children then. **HSCL Teacher***

### Better relationships

*And, also, ultimately then obviously the kids they're being helped at home with homework and able to complete it better. There's less kind of tension and stuff like that. They're happier kids in school. It's that cycle. The class teacher then is ultimately happier too. **HSCL Teacher***

### Honouring ambitions and measuring success

*I think the measure isn't of how many adults attended our parent courses went on for accreditation. I think the measure is how many of those adults felt it worked well, empowered them to help their children at home in the house. I would dislike strongly if it became an accreditation course. **ETB ALO***

*And, then not everybody who comes and does a course actually is ready for accreditation. And a lot of what we do under family literacy would be six-week courses, maybe in kind of engagement*

things, which may end up then for some of those parents coming into existing courses or could result in us doing something further with them, but is often the case that it's an engagement thing—you do something, helping your child with homework or spelling or helping your child with subtraction or helping third class kids with whatever they are learning. **ETB AEO**

Because we had a group who did the Irish at Level 3, and they kind of felt at the end of it that it was in contrast to what they actually wanted to do. They wanted to speak more and they wanted to be able to be a little more fluent, a little more confident. And they had all this writing to do and they had all these learning outcomes to complete. And they did it and they were able to do it, but it wasn't what they came for. **ETB ALO**

I'd just also say one thing to you about accreditation. We did do it with the English class. So we had an English language class. And we had a few years without and then we asked the parents would they like to and a lot of them said yes. And then I think the pressure became kind of where they were feeling the pressure coming on that they had to get this done and it had to be submitted. So it was no longer coming in and having conversation and learning about whatever or learning — it was now pressure. And we lost half of the class. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

## Progression

### New learning roles

Some continue on and some do get the bug, but once they have the confidence or they come in to find out what they want or to find out, then a lot of the time those learners they're gone for a while, then they come back, they'll re-engage. But at least they know where we are and they'll come back again. **ETB AEO**

### Progression within FET

My Baby and Me, well, we went onto My Toddler and Me and then the parents were saying, 'We've actually sorted ourselves out now to do a course and we'd love another course.' So we put them down for Caring For Children and Paediatric First Aid. We give them the suite of courses when they finish a course, and then we keep them on file. **ETB Resource Worker**

So we have found a lot of the parents will progress in and we've had a few men, we've had a few dads, particularly who came for the maths. **ETB Resource Worker**

## Educational guidance

The guidance officer is in the centre. So she'd make an appointment with the tutor to come in and speak with the group on a specific day, and then if anybody would like to speak with her individually they'll make that appointment. **ETB ALO**

## Scaffolding the next stages

... and at the end of that then when they're finished each of the programmes, we would bring in details, we would give them forms to fill in if they're interested in any other course. We would give them details of what goes on in the adult education service. So it's about lifelong learning, **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

I'd love to go to college and just do something and just feel, yeah, I've achieved something. But, I mean, come the end of this course anyway I will talk to somebody and say look it, I want to do something else now, and they'll help me decide. Yeah, from doing nothing, sitting feeling useless. **ETB Family Literacy Learner**

## Success is infectious

Almost 10 years ago I came back into education. I've kind of gone through the system. I'm now teaching. I did a couple of family learning classes when my son was in school. I've also gone back and done a level 5 and a level 6 in WIT. I did Applied Social Studies and Social Care there and then went on to do a postgraduate in teaching and FE. So I'm just newly teaching. **ETB Family Literacy Tutor**

These outcomes, from across the 16 ETBs, are indicative of the potential of family learning to engage some of the people who have been alienated by prior learning experiences. The data from the background research show abundant evidence of **progress** for adults on family learning programmes. Involvement in Snuggle Stories led to some learners completing QQI Child Development Levels 3 and 4 and establishing a potential employment destination. Some learners progressed to VTOS to acquire employment skills. Through completing QQI Level 1-3, adults **learned about portfolio building**. This made progression to future learning easier, as doing the portfolios taught them good timekeeping skills, how to complete a project and how to manage good group working relationships.

Through aspirations for their children, parents can be reconnected with their own learning potential and see their own and their children's lives transformed.



# Introductory remarks on 'Guidelines for Good Practice in Family Literacy'

These guidelines are created based on the learning from all aspects of the study of FET family literacy (Hegarty and Feeley, 2019) and an assumption that the systemic recommendations in the accompanying background report are agreed. The suggestions for a structure that might support good family literacy practice are not prescriptive. The guidelines can be interpreted in each ETB as part of a process of reviewing and strengthening local provision. The guidelines are written from a **New Literacy Studies perspective** that proposes that literacy varies according to the social context in which it is practised and needs to be reinterpreted in each new location (Hamilton et al, 2000). For example, literacy is not *performed* in the same way at home as it is in a more formal setting like the workplace. The language and punctuation we use in a *literacy event* like a text message are not the same as we might use in a formal letter to a child's schoolteacher.

Literacy is socially situated, and we all need to constantly learn to adjust to the expectations of each different *literacy context*. Some people think of there being not one but many different literacies (Street, 2003). We prefer to think of developing a **literacy toolkit** that allows an individual to deal appropriately with diverse literacy demands. In a rapidly changing world, we will need to add to this toolkit as language and literacy evolve to incorporate such things as changes in language, digital technology and online communications.

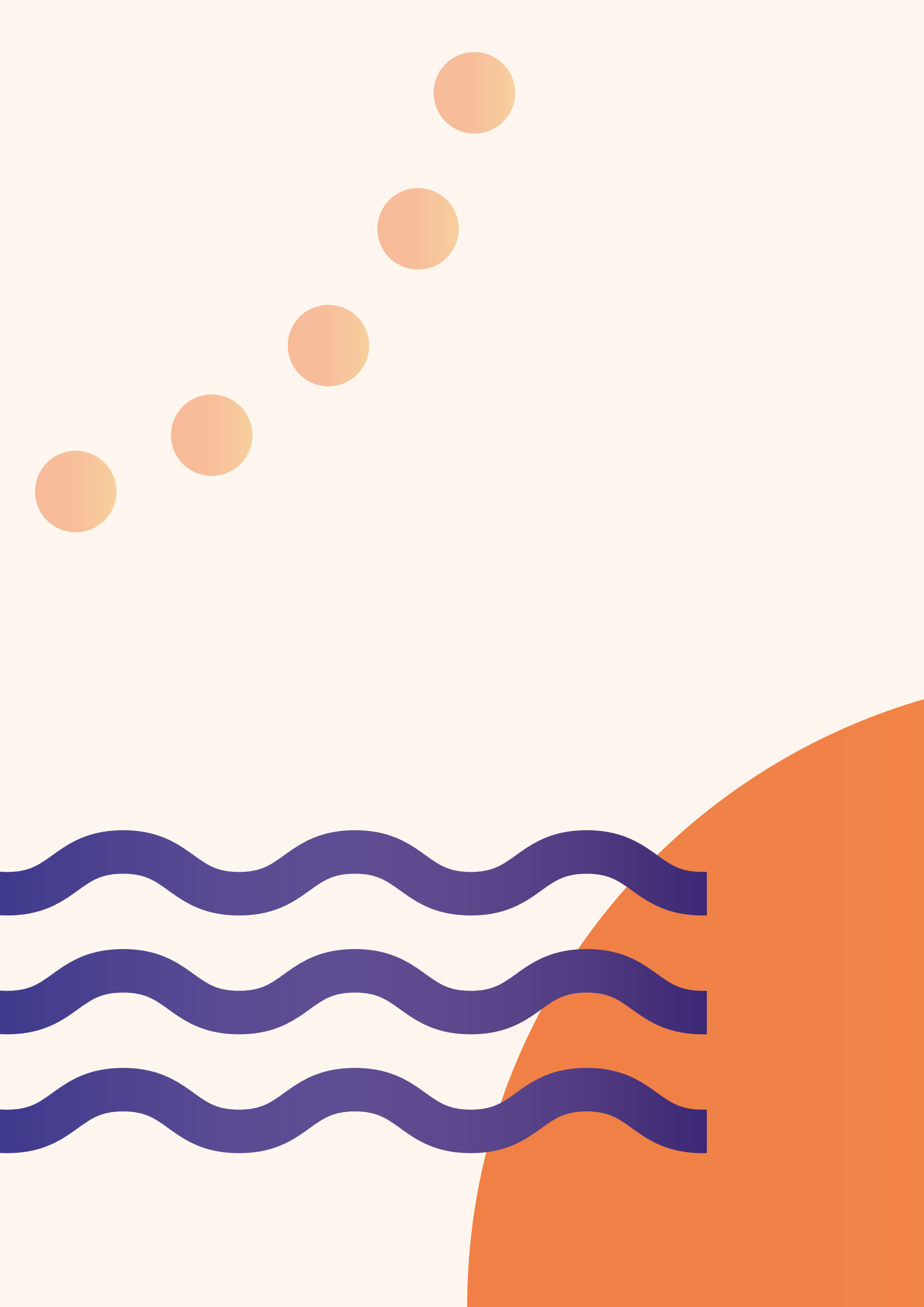
## Role of each ETB

Each ETB, must reflect, discuss and decide what structure and processes will best support family literacy in its catchment area. The guidelines aim to strengthen existing good family literacy practice so that it reaches as many families as possible and, bit-by-bit, contributes to more literacy equality for adults and children in Ireland. It is hoped that the guidelines will serve as useful signposts for ETBs as they design their own local family literacy strategies.

Each of the 14 guidelines presented here are interrelated and work in one guideline area will most likely positively impact on other guideline areas. Given the detail and areas for discussion contained in the guidelines, they have been categorised in terms of how they apply to:

1. How we think about family literacy in our ETBs,
2. How we operate family literacy in our ETBs,
3. How we ensure that gains made in family literacy are safeguarded for future learners and future generations.

What follows are 14 detailed guidelines to support the development of local family literacy strategies in ETBs.





# Guidelines for Good Family Literacy Practice



## 1. Taking time to think about family literacy

### Guideline 1.1 Retain a learner-centred ethos that values parents' role

Whether we recognise it or not, we all have a set of beliefs that underpin how we view the world and how we act in it. In the field of adult literacy, adopting an *adult learning approach* is usually seen as the most appropriate. Sometimes known as *andragogy* (Knowles, 1984) there are four basic precepts to an adult approach to facilitating learning that will ensure it is engaging and beneficial.

1. Adults need to be involved in planning and evaluating what they learn.
2. Experience (including mistakes) is the basis for adult learning.
3. The content of learning should be immediately relevant to the adult's life.
4. Learning should be problem-centred, or situational, rather than content orientated.

Paulo Freire approached adult literacy from a similar but more radical, egalitarian or critical viewpoint, and many adult literacy tutors approach their work from a Freirean perspective. If literacy is socially situated then the unequal state of that social context is relevant to the content and processes of literacy work. Critical learning theorists like Freire focused on creating anti-authoritarian, interactive and emancipatory learning experiences. (Freire, 1972; Apple, 2012; 2015)

Social inequalities are central to critical literacy and inform its content, learning relationships and outcomes. Like andragogy, critical literacy develops person-focused learning experiences that are characterised by active, socially and culturally authentic investigation rather than passive assimilation of detached and prescribed wisdom. The adult learning approach aims, therefore, not to be the purveyor of knowledge but to facilitate its discovery and rediscovery and to learn more clearly how to enable that to happen.

Unlike the 'banking' form of learning decried by Freirean pedagogy (Freire, 1972), critical literacy and andragogy both implicitly propose an approach to learning where learners actively create knowledge rather than passively absorbing knowledge created by others.

Wherever we are on the ideological continuum, we are never neutral. Our position always has its impact on our work. Each ETB needs to examine what an adult-learning approach means in their context so that every aspect of provision is informed by an adult-learning ethos.

In the case of family literacy, we respect that parents are experts in their own children and put them and their concerns at the centre of the work. In that way, learners will quickly come to understand that they are respected and viewed equally. Family literacy can become a new beginning where previous, possibly damaging experiences of learning can be left behind.

### Provide provision that is learner-centred

Delivery of family literacy should be sensitive to learners' needs and the learning environment should be comfortable, relaxed and accessible. Much family literacy takes place in contexts where learners, schools and communities have direct experience of social disadvantage and multiple inequalities. For that reason, tutors and other ETB staff need support around the degree to which they become critical pedagogues concerned with challenging the contextual injustices within which their work takes place. (Apple, 2012; 2015)

### Consider and plan collaborative partnerships

Michael Apple identified 9 tasks for the critical educator or organic intellectual. He suggests that the role of a tutor should:

1. Expose exploitation.
2. Indicate spaces for change.
3. Support community-led actions for change.
4. Deploy intellectual skills for the purpose of change.
5. Defend and extend the role of radical critical traditions.
6. Maintain focus and accessibility for multiple audiences.
7. Get off the balcony! (Meaning move on from observing to acting).
8. Embody the role of critical researcher and activist.
9. Use privilege to extend the reach of education to those without a voice (Apple, 2012; 2015).

These are ideological suggestions that will not coincide with all viewpoints, but they suggest that discussions about ethos are intricately connected to delivery. As such, they merit consideration in developing a collaborative partnership so that partners are each clear about terms of engagement.

The ideological tradition of critical literacy has strong roots in community-based adult learning (Freire and Macedo, 1987) and tutors and others are constantly challenged to balance tensions between ideology and policy. The degree to which inequality and social disadvantage are implicated in adult literacy and family learning is a significant part of the complex environment within which ETB work takes place.

### **Guideline 1.2 Identify and agree terms used in family literacy strategies**

The background research underpinning these guidelines provides guiding definitions to help develop local family literacy strategies. Definitions are diverse and important for who and what they include or omit. Some of the definitions below are from published material, and some are devised or adapted for this document. The intention is to include and respect all types of families. These definitions of types of literacy recognise the idea that family or school literacy practices may be in diverse languages including Irish, English and a wide range of other mother tongues used in families.

**Literacy** involves listening and speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and using everyday technology to communicate and handle information. However, it includes more than the technical skills of communication. It also has personal, social and economic dimensions. Literacy increases the opportunity for individuals and communities to reflect on their situation, explore new possibilities and initiate change. (NALA, 2011b)

**Digital literacy** is the ability to use various digital platforms to find, evaluate, create and communicate information in a range of text, visual and auditory media. These may include mobile phones, tablets, laptop computers, PCs and televisions. Digital literacy combines technical and cognitive skills and has many applications for leisure, health, work, individual and family learning. (Feeley, Hegarty, 2019)

**Family** is a unit of people bound by special affective relationships; these may be multi-generational, historic and rooted in biological bonds or lifetime commitments of love, care and solidarity. (Hegarty and Feeley, 2010)

**Family literacy** describes the uses of literacy and numeracy within families and communities, especially activities that involve two or more generations. Family literacy also denotes education programmes that help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context. (NALA, 2004: 8)

**Family literacy ESOL** is the opportunity to learn and practise English in the context of becoming included in the community and supporting children's schooling. Family literacy ESOL may include literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, but it has a primary focus on oral language acquisition. (Feeley, Hegarty, 2019)

**Integrated/themed family literacy** is the process of developing language, literacy, numeracy and digital

literacy in the context of, and at the same time as, learning a new skill. Parents and children may learn the new skill together or parents may learn how to support the child in learning both the skill and the integrated literacy element at home. Integrated family literacy helps support parents to identify literacy learning moments as part of everyday family life. (Feeley, Hegarty, 2019)

### **Guideline 1.3 Focus on the value of learning relationships and resource this work**

Relationships are fundamental to the organisational structure for family literacy proposed here. The work that develops and sustains learning care relationships should be recognised as time consuming work (Feeley, 2014). Recognising the value of learning relationships is fundamental to adequately resourcing this core element of the work. ETBs need to support those that negotiate and sustain the relationships that underpin the delivery and outcomes of family literacy work. Well-resourced learning relationships will translate into more extensive and effective family literacy delivery and ultimately contribute to reaching national and EU targets in lifelong learning.

### **Guideline 1.4 Celebrate achievements in learning and other outcomes**

A particularly joyful part of the adult learning process is celebrating achievements. There are many occasions when family literacy celebrations can happen. It may be at the end of an activity or course when parents (and children) are satisfied with the learning they have achieved. It may be that learners have completed an evaluation and have recognised the extent of their learning. It may be when an accreditation is completed. Celebrations may be a way of acknowledging a successful collaborative partnership or an opportunity to raise awareness of family literacy and attract new learners.





## 2. Developing and delivering learner-centred programmes

### Guideline 2.1 Provide a range of relevant and accessible courses for learners

Family literacy activities should be designed with learners at local level and draw on existing course outlines.

Each ETB will have its menu of family literacy activities that is published in ways that make them accessible to prospective learners. As an adult learning approach suggests, family learners should be involved in establishing the detail of their own learning experience. This does not mean every activity is completely new. A body of existing course outlines exist, and they are accessible through NALA's *Tutors information hub* section of the NALA website<sup>3</sup> and through [www.fetchcourses.ie](http://www.fetchcourses.ie). Many course outlines are adapted to meet the needs and interests of particular groups and communities. Clare Family Learning also has several publications that include resource guides and all of which are available online.<sup>4</sup>

Trained family literacy tutors are adept at course development and learner-centred literacy delivery. These activities for learners will be closely related to family, school and community interests. Communities may be geographical or special interest groups of parents and carers with whom course content and delivery can be negotiated.

### Guideline 2.2 Use a central repository of family literacy resources

Developing and piloting new family literacy activities is a local matter.

#### Share resources

Sharing material family literacy resources is possible through the online *Tutors information hub* on NALA's website. Some ETBs have developed short video resources and use of these may be negotiated directly. The ETBI digital library which is currently being developed may contribute to this collaboration. A repository for all family literacy materials should be developed and centrally managed so that the

provenance of ideas and materials is clear and safe storage ensured.

### Guideline 2.3 Prioritise access for learners with greatest need

Learners with greatest need should have **priority access** to family learning opportunities. This is a long engagement process. Those who are reluctant to return to learning, because they have lost their trust in the system of education, need the greatest effort invested in their reengagement. They need to be convinced that family literacy will make a positive contribution to their family life and make their children more secure and successful in their schooling and in later life.

#### Publicise provision

ETB networks, school, libraries, childhood and youth networks can be used to publicise family literacy provision. Community groups and agencies are well placed to connect learners with available learning opportunities. Children and other family literacy learners are amongst the most convincing advocates for family learning. Assets from the national adult literacy and numeracy awareness raising campaign<sup>5</sup> can also be used at the local level to promote the benefits of family literacy.

#### Design strategies to reach under-represented adults

Strategies to engage under-represented groups in family literacy, in particular men, should be designed with partners so that the benefits are extended to all family members. Available learning opportunities across the country can be posted on the [helpmykidlearn.ie](http://helpmykidlearn.ie) website and regularly updated.

### Guideline 2.4 Establish clear and agreed ways to measure – and track – success at local level

#### Locally-developed criteria are best

Establishing criteria for success will be part of **each** local family literacy strategy.

#### Adult and childhood gains with accreditation as an option

These guidelines recommend that accreditation remains optional and not a core target of family literacy. Accreditation targets were considered by many as inappropriate for family literacy. National policymakers recognise the complexities of engaging those who are multiply disadvantaged, and, as such, accreditation should not be demanded in this context as a measure of success.

<sup>3</sup> [nala.ie/tutors](http://nala.ie/tutors) accessed 22 February 2019.

<sup>4</sup> [Clare Family Learning Resources](#) accessed 22 February 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Campaign title: Take the First Step

Criteria for successful family literacy must have congruent measures of success, and this may not involve QQI accreditation. At the same time, family literacy is a form of adult education and not solely for the benefit of children. Family literacy is a prime motivating factor in adult engagement and adult learning aspirations are valid and important. A balance between adult and childhood gains is not difficult to achieve and the evidence strongly suggests that everyone can be a winner in family literacy.

It would be interesting to gather more evidence of the short-term and longer-term gains of children involved in family literacy. This data might be gathered at a local level or through inclusion in larger longitudinal studies. What the children say about family literacy promises to give another perspective on the benefits of family literacy practice.

Where there is an interest in accredited family literacy and a dearth of appropriate QQI modules, these may be developed using the expertise of practitioners. The potential for devising short QQI modules or elements of modules that match family literacy's purpose and delivery should be resourced. Accumulating credits from short courses may be attractive to some learners and tutors.

### Identifying, measuring and certifying soft skill gains

Whether or not QQI accreditation is being pursued, there is scope for to capture the wider benefits of learning such as:

- aspects of social and emotional intelligence,
- listening,
- communicating,
- flexibility in groups,
- people skills, and
- empathy.

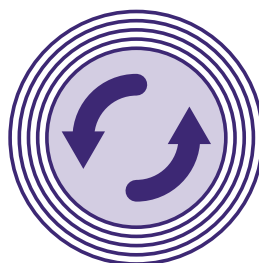
Identifying the skills in family literacy activities and measures that affirm learners' progress is an alternative to formal accreditation. ETB/FET certification for soft skills and attendance would be encouraging for participants and provide a measure of positive outcomes other than accreditation.

In collaborative family literacy partnerships, success should be measured across the partner groups. Success may lie in engagement, retention, and progression or in some positive indicator of family literacy having been an effective intervention. Alongside FET gains, DEIS schools, libraries, CYPSCs and others should track the successes attributable to family literacy so that an inclusive result can be captured.

## Guideline 2.5 Involve family literacy tutors, organisers and learners at all phases of the design, delivery and promotion

Family literacy tutors and organisers are best placed to support learners as they begin to identify the next steps they wish to take. Educational guidance workers are available by appointment and will speak to groups or individual learners.

We have seen in the review of ETB family literacy practice that introducing adult learners to new learning locations and staff is a way of creating a bridge to the next stages of the learning journey. It is worth reminding learners that they are the most influential form of publicising family literacy to other parents. Word-of-mouth recommendations are a trusted means of information sharing particularly where people are wary of re-engagement in education.



## 3. Future-proofing for flexible, responsive and appropriate family learning

### Guideline 3.1 Remain familiar with, and contribute to, policy and research

Family literacy is mentioned in a range of policies at national, European and global level. Core childhood and adult educational policy has a strong focus on improving levels of literacy. There are a number of governmental departments with a mandate to support families and a range of agencies operating at regional and local levels who link with adults and families in greatest need of support. Keeping abreast of developments relating to family support in areas that are complementary to education can pave the way for timely interactions with colleagues in other organisations and departments with a mandate for family support.

Feeding into policy development is also an important consideration for the development of family learning. The FET sector provides valuable information to assist with reporting to the European Social Fund for literacy, family literacy and lifelong learning. This is one of the reasons why substantial amounts of data is collected during the FET registration process. Good reporting can shape better policies into the future.

While much research undertaken at national and European level relating to family learning is at the macro level, there is a need for more research which tells the nuanced stories of engagement, outcomes and progression at the local level. ETBs may wish to engage such research during the next<sup>6</sup>, and subsequent FET strategies.

### Guideline 3.2 Create and maximise family literacy strategies that meet local needs and get the most value from funding

There are choices to be made about the organisation of family literacy in each ETB area. Here are some points to consider when making these choices.

#### Coordination of family literacy

All ETBs supported coordination for family literacy. They suggested that family literacy **coordination** is a responsibility that needs to be held by professionals who organise the consultation from which the family literacy strategy emerges.

An emphasis on coordination will develop and maintain collaborative relationships and manage a programme of family literacy events that meet local needs. Coordination of family literacy will include planning provision, collecting accurate data that presents an accessible picture of overall delivery, and evaluating provision. In geographically large areas, the ETB may decide that a number of people share this task and collaborate closely to ensure cohesion and best use of resources.

The coordination and management of family literacy should be rooted in a local plan and based on clear structures rather than the actions of an individual.

Coordination of FET family literacy in each ETB will have the following areas of responsibility:

- curricular,
- personnel, and
- budgetary management.

Each of these areas will take place within the parameters of ETB policy and guidelines. Most important is the underlying **relational area** of the organisational structure that involves making good learning relationships across a wide range of colleagues and stakeholders. The position should reflect the breadth of skills and responsibility required.

#### Collaborative partnership

Collaborative partnership was also thought to be important. Research has shown that key to a family literacy organisational structure is the task of building, developing and sustaining a collaborative partnership. Research also confirms that an interagency approach is key to accessing those parents who, because of previous unhappy experiences, may be unlikely to

return to the education system. (Carpentieri, 2011; NIACE, 2013a).

Core partners in family literacy work are:

- the DEIS schools,
- HSCL teachers,
- local libraries, and
- Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSCs).

Each of these has a **departmental policy imperative (and budget)** to apportion to family literacy. Each in turn will have a **network of stakeholders** who may be drawn upon to extend the reach of this area of literacy.

Led by the ETB, the core collaborative partnership should meet regularly to maintain momentum and share the work. A wider group of interested partners should meet at least twice a year to plan and review the effectiveness of the year's programme of family literacy activities. A record should be kept of the actions agreed at each partnership group meeting, so that family literacy is sustainably organised and necessary information is available.

#### Other supports at national and local levels

A development stage of each core family literacy group should be resourced so that an ethos, mission and strategic plan can be agreed.

Necessary Service Level Agreements (SLAs) or protocols will be put in place at departmental level and an interdepartmental group, and they should support and champion the work in ETBs.

An annual national **conference** will provide an opportunity to showcase and debate innovative and controversial areas of family literacy work.

The community of family literacy workers and learners may devise **other ways** to maintain the structure and network opportunities with colleagues and peer learners. Websites like [helpmykidlearn.ie](http://helpmykidlearn.ie) and magazines like NALA's *Literacy Matters* may be used to support communication and information exchange about family literacy.

#### Cost neutral innovations

Opportunities to have family learning programmes supported by other relevant organisations should be explored. There are many schemes in place which aim to foster a love of reading in children of all ages. For example, partnerships for book-gifting could be explored within or across ETBs so that all children and parents can have age-appropriate books in their home.

Because literacy is local, as well as generic, each ETB will create its own structure within the available resources and strategic imperatives.

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### **Guideline 3.3 Ensure there are sufficient learner supports**

#### **Network with other parents**

Family literacy learners got support and satisfaction from the solidarity they discovered from relationships formed with other parents. Recognising learners' needs to network and facilitating this may be possible for some ETBs.

NALA's online *Students' corner* may be of interest to some learners, as may the possibility to become a student ambassador and attract other learners to family literacy.

#### **Promote information provision**

Career Guidance and Information Services are also valuable resources to learners, and learners should be reminded of their availability. We have seen evidence that book-gifting is a valuable resource and a way of ensuring that all families have books available in the home. ETBs could consider investigating local sponsorship schemes in this regard and collaboration with local libraries will ensure families learn that there is a ready supply of books available to them and their children.

#### **Address childcare and transport barriers**

Childcare and transport were cited as barriers to learning and local solutions to these issues can be investigated. Again, partnerships with childcare providers and local link bus services may be formed that may provide some solutions.

### **Guideline 3.4 Ensure there are sufficient tutor supports**

#### **Create networking opportunities**

Adult and family literacy tutors need to network with each other. Tutors often work part-time and some can be relatively isolated when working with groups, as they don't have regular contact with peers. Sustaining communications with tutors is an important aspect of learning relationships and needs to be planned into individual ETB structures. Tutors should be encouraged and supported to avail of any relevant networking opportunities. ETBs should consider ways to support tutors to avail of such opportunities while avoiding any financial or time-related cost to the tutor.

### **Provide continuing professional development and other support**

In the same way that networking opportunities are important for family literacy tutors, so too are other supports, including continuing professional development. Again, ETBs should consider ways to support tutors to avail of CPD opportunities while avoiding any financial or time-related cost to the tutor.

Tutor solidary networks should be encouraged and promoted so that all staff have a sense of belonging and sharing in the local family literacy strategy.

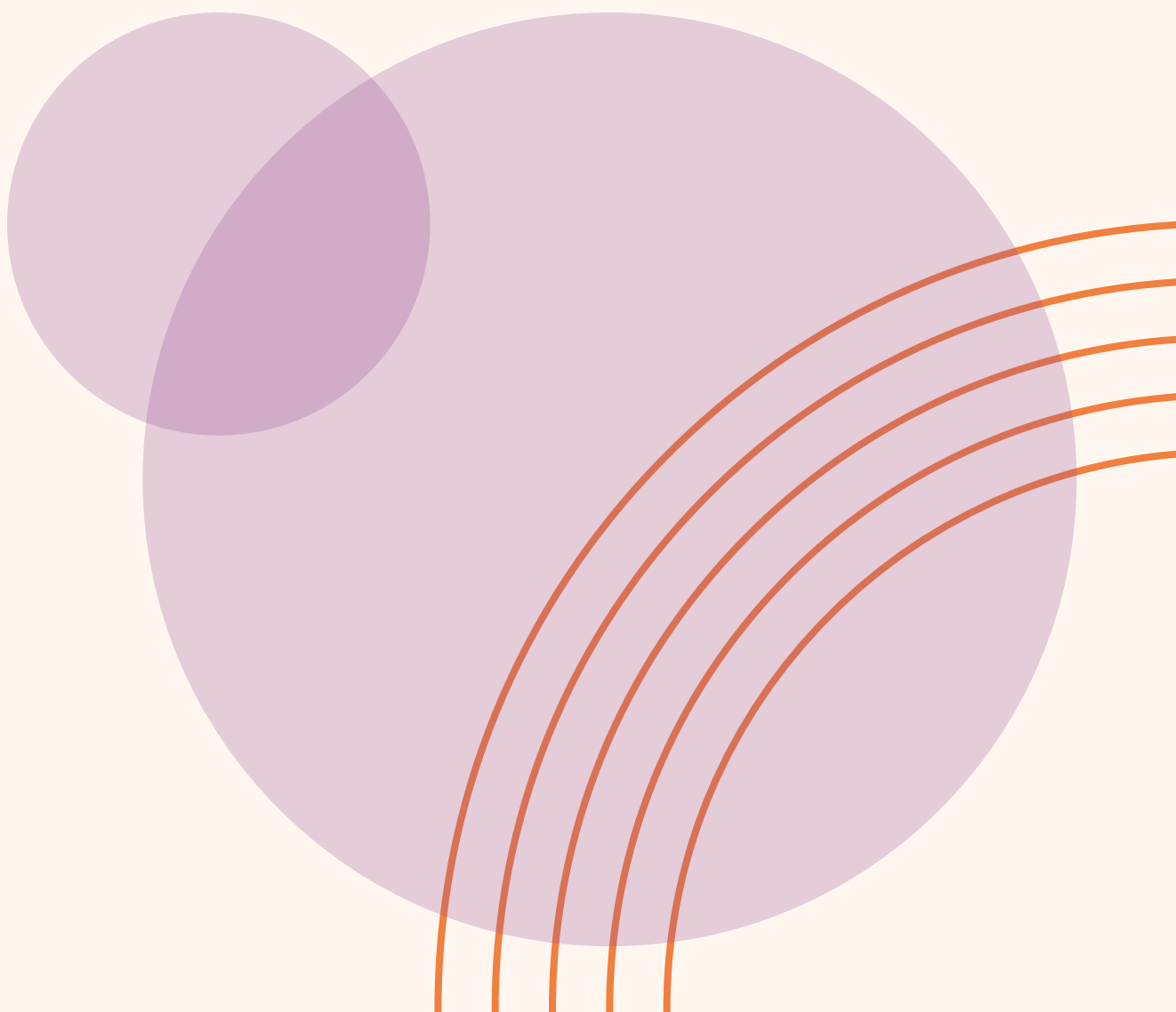
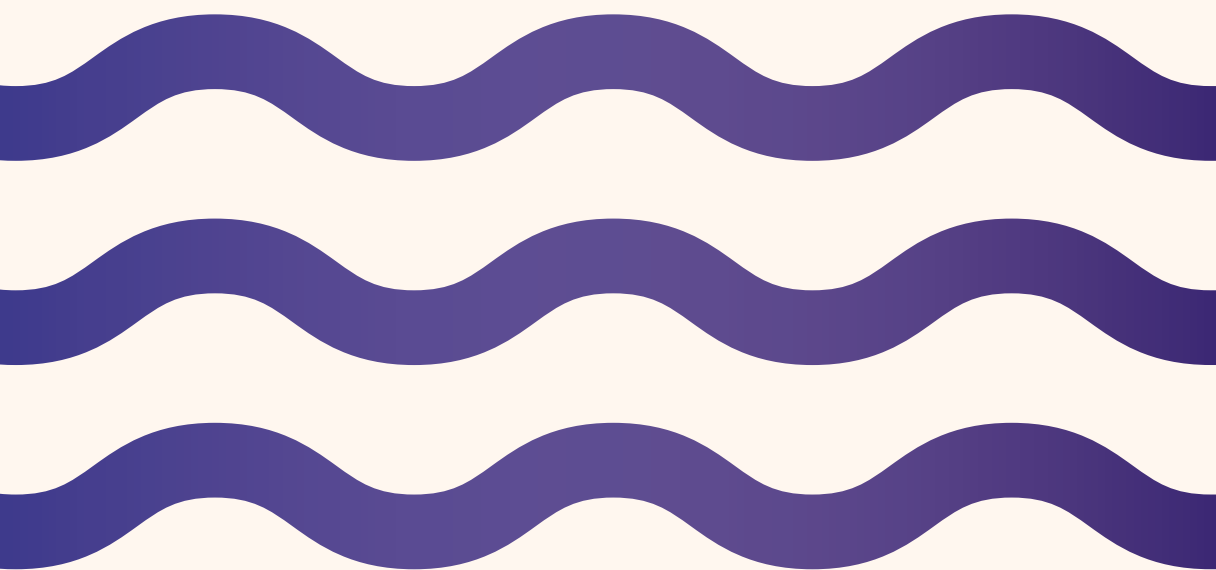
### **Guideline 3.5 Ensure reliable data is gathered in a user-friendly way – and reported on to track learning outcomes**

SOLAS, ETBI and ETBs will agree the data collection system for future FET family literacy.

This data will be important in tracking the full extent of family literacy delivery and outcomes. Obligations to report on family literacy, as part of ESF funding, are at the root of much of the learner registration process. Strategies to make cumbersome ways of recording data more user-friendly and less time-consuming are currently being developed.

Where family literacy providers find alternative ways to record achievements these should be shared with ETBI and SOLAS so that the potential to capture all positive learning outcomes, as well as those for administrative purposes, is fully explored.





# Case studies of good practice

The three case studies presented below are taken verbatim from the background research produced by Dr Maggie Feeley and Dr Ann Hegarty. Throughout the background research report Maggie and Ann refer to themselves as 'we' / 'us' as opposed to 'the researchers'. This is in-keeping with their status as practitioner researchers (as detailed in the background research report), and retains the natural feel of the findings and preserves the immediacy of what was encountered by Ann and Maggie.

Family literacy ideally responds to learner needs and so the profile of practice varies greatly from one ETB area to another depending on the specific locality and the development of programmes that meet their parents' learning priorities. History plays its part too in that some family literacy providers have had a longer period of engagement with this field of study than others. Consequently, they have had more opportunities to refine their portfolio of family literacy events, to build collaborative networks and to enrich the skill base of tutors that interact with parents and children. Our research has uncovered a number of important features of family literacy programme provision, and the three examples that we have selected to elaborate on exemplify some of these key features.

In our ETB visits, we witnessed fine examples of family literacy delivered with care, skill and enthusiasm. All these activities are successfully engaging parents and other family members in the vital work of intergenerational learning. From the practice we saw, it is clear that family literacy infuses adult learning with the joy and fun of involvement with childhood learning and development. It transfers attention away from the adult and places the focus on how to facilitate children's learning. In this way, skilled family literacy tutors enable adults to learn while maintaining the connection with the transfer of new skills and knowledge within the family.

For many parents we talked to, their experience in the ETB was the first encounter where they felt that they could be a successful learner. There is evidence that some parents progress from family literacy to courses for their own intellectual growth and development. Some progress to accredited courses and others find employment that fits with their family circumstances.

We present our three case studies here in the order in which we visited them. In each case, we met with a range of ETB staff and learners involved in family

literacy. We visited some examples of family literacy provision and met with a range of stakeholders involved in collaborating in local delivery. In addition to the visits to each ETB, where possible, we studied written and audio-visual materials and artefacts that had been developed through family literacy curriculum development and delivery. These gave a flavour of the role the programmes played in adult and family literacy for individuals, families, schools and the wider community. Our accounts are evidence-based and rooted in data recorded, transcribed and subsequently coded and analysed using MAXQDA – a software tool that allows rigorous and systematic scrutiny of qualitative and quantitative data. We have verified the content of the case studies with the relevant ETBs.

These three examples of good practice illustrate a substantial amount of good adult learning practice delivered by dedicated, skilled and inspirational tutors. We do **not** suggest that the examples here are better than what is done elsewhere, but these examples of family learning merit particular attention. In each case study, we place learner voices alongside those of the ETB staff whose work is key to the success of these activities.

## Case studies

The case practice examples we studied, and the numbers of family literacy learners in each, were as follows:

Good practice example 1: Limerick and Clare ETB (LCETB), and themed literacy – sewing and quilting (300 family literacy learners)

Good practice example 2: Kilkenny and Carlow ETB (KCETB), the Friday Group (30 family literacy learners)

Good practice example 3: Waterford and Wexford ETB (WWETB), engaging and retaining marginalised parents (180 family literacy learners)



## Good practice example 1: Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB) and themed literacy

In LCETB, there are 2,434 adult literacy learners and 300 of these are family literacy learners. Table 4 below provides more detail on family literacy provision in this ETB in terms of hours, staffing, courses, accreditation options and so on.

*Table 4: Limerick and Clare ETB in numbers*

Category	Total
Total number of adult literacy learners	2,434
Total of family literacy learners	300
Family literacy hours per week	32
Paid family literacy tutor hours in 2017	1,300
Family literacy organiser hours per week	37
Family literacy courses in 2017	81
Hours of family literacy in 2017	1,300
Accredited options on offer	Yes
QQI Levels	1-3
Course completers	300
Progression to more learning	160

The range of family learning skills, knowledge and experience in Clare Family Learning, LCETB, is well known across national and international literacy circles. Clare Family Learning (CFL) celebrated 25 years of delivering family learning in 2019. Since 1994, Clare Family Learning has had a rich history at the centre of Ireland's development of family learning as an important element of lifelong learning. CFL has designed innovative provision, been responsive to parents' learning needs, participated in collaborative programme delivery, developed practice guides and exemplar materials and generously shared experience and resources with providers elsewhere. Every ETB in this study mentioned CFL for its flagship role in family literacy and its solidarity with colleagues.

The first family learning tutor training took place in Ennis, County Clare in 1998. Since then CFL has regularly delivered training to tutors throughout Ireland and from further afield. The family learning staff in CFL are experienced, have a wide array of skills and knowledge and are constantly innovating and adding to their repertoire of provision. A number of EU states continue to send staff to Ennis for training and scholars have completed postgraduate and doctoral studies on CFL's accomplishments. US and other academics spend study time in Clare and write and speak of the excellent practice they have witnessed.

It was difficult to choose an aspect of CFL as a case study given the breadth of provision. The family learning

menu of courses and activities now spans, the whole learning route from birth to college. There are a host of programmes for parents who want support to develop their children's literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and creativity. Activities that smooth transitions into – and out of – diverse educational sectors are also in place.

Aware of the gap in learning activity between birth and three years of age, when the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) becomes available to families, CFL has most recently developed a new offering: *My Baby and Me*. This was adapted and further developed from an original class offered in Sligo, and is accompanied by innovative materials and skilled tuition. Now an eight-week course, *My Baby and Me*, has drawn on tutors' skills in language, literacy and numeracy development alongside psychotherapy, child development and parenting.

At the heart of family learning, CFL fosters adults' need for **self-actualisation** through the desire for further education and training. As a fundamental factor in enabling the parent to become the child's first teacher, CFL nurtures the learning development of parents, so they can more confidently embrace that role. We gathered robust evidence of CFL's skilled approach to integrated family literacy during a two-day immersion in the CFL's activities. The case study we choose to share here is of a family learning course in **sewing and quilt making**. We visited the group in action, interviewed the tutor and several learners. The learners were articulate and insightful, and the model of themed or integrated family literacy merited further reflection.

### Ethos

LCETB does not have an agreed family literacy ethos, mission or strategy across the ETB. However, in parts of the ETB, especially Clare, there is a strong and proven commitment to family learning. This is articulated in the survey comments:

*We respond to the needs of our learners, where they are in their lives, and build on their existing knowledge. We value the home as a learning place, stressing the importance of the parent as their child's first teacher. We enable the building of social networks for parents and, in all this, we encourage the notion of lifelong learning.*

The practice of this ethos is evident in the relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere in all of the centres and schools we visited. In the adult learning centre in Ennis, family learning takes place alongside other further education and training (FET) courses. This enables parents to gradually become part of a learning community. It also means that progressing to other areas and levels of study can be made less daunting. Relationships across subject areas and learning levels are promoted in such a way that transitions and progressions are part of daily provision.



As one learner indicated:

*Yeah, and that's what I like about the adult education. Because in Ireland as a child, you got walloped if you didn't know it, and it wasn't that oh, you might be dyslexic or maths mightn't be your strong suit. Just, you didn't get it, so you were stupid. But we're not stupid. We just have a different way of learning and I feel like dealing with the tutors here - they each see you as your individual person and they teach you that way that suits you - I feel anyway.* **LCETB Family Literacy Learner**

## Collaboration

CFL works in close collaboration with partners throughout the catchment areas and beyond. We met a group of HSCL teachers who are working across the two counties, and we discussed with them how they work in cooperation with CFL in joint family learning ventures. CFL is closely connected, amongst others, to:

- the DEIS Schools and HSCL teachers,
- Children and Young Peoples Services Committee (CYPSC),
- Local libraries,
- Roma and Irish Traveller groups,
- St Vincent de Paul,
- Immigrant Support Services,
- Family Resources centres,
- Support workers,
- the County Childcare Committee, and
- Clare Haven Women's Shelter.

These agencies help to engage learners and collaborate in making appropriate family learning available to parents throughout the community. Much of that provision takes the form of outreach courses, and the tutors we met facilitate family learning throughout the catchment area and beyond.

In Clare, the Adult Literacy Organiser's position is predominantly that of Family Learning Coordinator. Her extensive role in maintaining, managing and developing all aspects of family learning – including tutor support and continuing professional development (CPD) – far exceeds the demands of a single ETB area. In addition to tutor training work at national level, she sustains a network of interested, international tutors and scholars and ensures a respected profile for Ireland in international family learning circles. Despite this expansive responsibility, she still maintains close and caring relationships with all: learners, colleagues, interagency partners and international family learning actors.

## Family learning practice

At a time when an integrated approach to literacy and numeracy is beginning to take cultural hold across youth and adult FET, it is interesting to consider the usefulness of this approach in family learning provision. Many tutors have consciously been embedding literacy and numeracy into broader vocational learning for some time. Here we look at adding the context of family learning so that a parent is learning a vocational skill with literacy and numeracy and digital literacy integrated across the content. At the same time, they are learning about their own learning process and how to facilitate learning (of literacy, numeracy and the vocational skill) with other family members.

## Integration in practice

The sewing and quilting family learning course has been delivered for 14 years by a tutor who is qualified in art, sewing, literacy and family learning. She teaches a number of accredited Art and Design courses, and the family learning Sewing and Quilting is accredited at QQI Levels 1-3. CFL find that some learners need a roundabout route into literacy learning, and this can be through initial engagement in a practical subject like sewing, cookery or even stained glass making. The accreditation route is not pushed on new learners but sensitively presented as optional. In practice, the tutor finds that most people opt for the QQI pathway. The approach is to scaffold subject specific language acquisition so that learning is incremental and measured.

*I explain that almost everyone has a problem because the manuals that you get ...they're impossible to understand. Paper patterns are impossible to understand. So, you are starting at the very beginning. And then literacy isn't really that much of a problem, because you introduce these words really slowly and you write them up on the board and they write them into their purple book that I give them. And so, they get used to these words one by one and they know what they mean.*

### LCETB Family Literacy Tutor

*The sewing and quilting course has reading and writing skills in-built. Acquisition of new vocabulary is stepped and learners given a method to note and learn the meaning of new terms. These are rehearsed in class and the way to retain new language is modelled from the beginning.*

*So their vocabulary when they've finished is pretty big, enormous. And we do a lot of writing onto the board and they copy it down to try and remind them, to get things in their head.* **LCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Digital literacy is also practiced, as phones and iPads are used in class to research topics and design details for quilt squares. While we were visiting the group, they were planning squares for a suffrage centenary

quilt. They were looking for images of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and discussing how she broke a window in Dublin Castle in the 1920s. Written notes were made and images stored for tracing onto fabric. Numeracy was ever-present in measuring cloth, stitches, the dimension of panels and so on.

*I think the maths learning is very significant ... like we use set squares and protractors ... and cutting things neatly and incorporating seam allowances into things you're really cutting. So they really have to think of the conscious cut. And measurements ... like I would do about metric measures – millimetres and centimetres and so on measuring, and adding seam allowances and remembering the seam allowance each side. And things like symmetry, and parallel lines, and how to spell them properly.*

*And there are also all those maths skills that you miss out on if you don't do Junior Cert maths. We were just talking when they were cutting out the hammer on the quilt they were making about suffrage, and I said, 'we could cut it on the straight grain', they all know about the grain – 'but let's cut it on the bias, because if we do it won't fray'. So they went, 'What's the bias again?' '45 degrees off the straight grain.' So the straight grain is the warp thread, the cross grain's the weft thread, and the bias is at 45 degrees. And we all know 45 degrees is half a right angle. So I drew that up on the board, and I watched them get out their books and write it down. **LCETB Family Literacy Tutor***

Although for QQI Levels 1-3 learners have to grapple with new and complicated language and concepts, it is done incidentally as an integral part of the creative process. It then becomes a secondary and subsidiary consideration.

*We don't even mention it. Literacy isn't really mentioned to them. Okay, this is a family learning class. This is all about learning things to take home and do with the kids in your life. And I don't go, 'this is about learning words and how to sew properly and how to measure and how to write down a measurement. So on the last day usually you do an evaluation and then go, 'Let's see do we know what these words mean before you go off. It's slipping them into a world of new words, new techniques. It is literacy by stealth, isn't it really? **LCETB Family Literacy Tutor***

### Learner experience of family learning

Adopting a Freirean approach to adult learning makes a positive impact on learners. We spoke to three women who had unsatisfactory school experiences and were conscious of having unmet literacy needs. One woman described her experience of family literacy learning in the following positive terms. Her new experience of a learner-friendly pedagogy was overshadowing her previous negative experiences.

*That's what I love about this is everybody builds you up. You know what, they boost you. There's never a 'oh God, look at the state of that'. It's 'that's fantastic'. And even if you instinctively go to knock yourself, which we have a dirty habit of, the tutor will kind of pounce in straight away. She'll say, 'No, but look at that.' Like she'll always pointing out the strengths we have. **LCETB Family Literacy Learner***

Another learner was happy to have found that learning to learn could be an enjoyable process. She described becoming isolated at school because of her undiagnosed dyslexia. She has three daughters who are also struggling with literacy, but they are getting supports at school that she had not received. She said that others with a similar learning legacy did not want to put themselves in that situation again, and so, did not engage in adult learning.

*So they don't want to put themselves in that situation, to feel less than who they are. And everybody is unique and everybody is beautiful but it's just when you're a child and you're being taught that actually no, you're different, you're wrong, you need to be punished and isolated, that's wrong. So when you're going back to the College you can inadvertently go back as a child. Then when you go back and you step in – Yeah – when you go back and you see them and actually, you know, they're nice and they're friendly, you're like damn it, you've missed out on so much. **LCETB Family Literacy Learner***

Another woman who returned to learning because she was unable to help her children with homework described her lack of confidence. She had initially come to get help with reading and to try to develop her confidence. Her experience in the Sewing and Quilting course allowed her to progress to an adult literacy class in addition to the sewing class. Sewing was the hook for her.

*I think if you have nice stuff to introduce them [learners] to. That might get them settled in. I don't know, that's my story. It's got me in here. And actually it was after that I came for the reading. **LCETB Family Literacy Learner***

All three learners that we spoke to were lavish in their praise of their tutor and of family learning as a resource that has been transformational for them. One learner described how the relaxed atmosphere in the group had allowed her to become socially integrated:

*I certainly can feel relaxed when I come in here. I'm not uptight and nervous. Yeah, from doing nothing, sitting feeling useless. Now I feel I'm doing something. I'm getting back out there. It might be something – it mightn't be much at the moment, but it's basically a steppingstone for me. I'd probably be at home in my house and not going outside the door, very depressed. That's the truth. **LCETB Family Literacy Learner***

One learner whose sewing skills now allow her produce articles that are of a saleable standard, plans to continue learning, to go to college and to start her own business.

## Outcomes

Family learners communicated a sense of engagement and inclusion in the culture of adult learning. One woman bought a second-hand sewing machine for her daughter, and they now sew together at home. She told us how her radically improved sense of self-worth had changed relationships in the home, and her family's well-being was also markedly better.

An older woman got part-time employment as a cleaner in the local hospital, in some part because she was able to say she was enrolled in an adult learning course. She was also able to get references from tutors. She said she felt more confident every day she left after class. This meant, at work, she was no longer the quiet person at the back during meetings and intimidated by visits from inspectors from the Health Information Quality Authority (HIQA).

*Weeks went on then, I wasn't at the back anymore. I was coming up the front, wanted to learn more. I was interested. I felt I could do a lot.* **LCETB Family Literacy Learner**

The learners we met were finished QQI Level 3, and some were planning to progress to Level 4 in another location. Those who needed to stay in local learning facilities because of childcare demands planned to take on other courses, and one person planned to continue with literacy classes as well.

Beyond the measurable outcomes of QQI accreditation, employment skills in timekeeping, project planning and completion and working collaboratively in a group were also evident. Furthermore, the course tutor was aware of cognitive development that could be used in other areas of study and in work.

*I suppose it sort of opens your mind, doesn't it? And then you start thinking. And I go, 'You've got to start using your sewing eyes and you look at things with sewing eyes and you see how they're made.' And they start to say that home actually — 'I was in the shop and looked at how it was made, and I thought oh, I know how to make that now.' You know, when you get them, they don't understand things about putting the right sides together and doing the seam and then turning it to the right side and all the seams are constructed with right sides facing. So things like reversal and other concepts that are transferable to the workplace.* **LCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Family learning and accreditation contributed to a new identity for the women we spoke with. One woman, for example, became the 'fixer' in her family, and the person to whom everyone looked when sewing and creative skills were called for. She was particularly pleased to have won the admiration and respect of her mother and three daughters.

The tutor told us that a number of people moved to VTOS from the Level 3 sewing class, and others had gained part-time work doing repairs and alterations that suited their care responsibilities. And, others were able to make things for themselves and their families and gained great satisfaction from that.

The tutor was convinced that creativity was a capability to awaken in people and that the demise of handwork was a cultural loss. People become engaged in learning when there is the chance to learn how to make things.

*And you get people — people are happier when they're making things. All their worries disappear.* **LCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

The learners seemed to bear this message out. Creativity allowed them to find an assurance that they had lost at school and to become engaged adult learners. Sewing was a stepping-stone for some from, and into, adult literacy learning. Furthermore, the integrated approach to sewing and quilting meant that they were already more confident about literacy and numeracy learning and now had other skills and knowledge to bring with them.

*Find out who you are. When you find you enjoy something, it develops you as a person as well, I think. You have a ball of wool and next minute you see — and it's something.* **LCETB Family Literacy Learner**

## Conclusions

This integrated approach to family learning is multifaceted and engages those who are drawn to creative approaches to learning. With the focus on literacy and numeracy somewhat blurred, learners are absorbed in the practical aspects of the Sewing and Quilting course and enabled to learn valuable things incidentally.

We gathered evidence of learners' self-esteem and learning skills transformed by their experience of integrated family literacy. Literacy, digital literacy and numeracy levels were raised. Many achieved QQI Levels 1-3 accreditation and aspired to progress to further training, work, including or self-employment. Parents shared their new learning and revitalised attitudes to learning with their children and other family members.

The Sewing and Quilting course is a skilled and impressive example of family learning that builds on learners' existing skills whilst strategically scaffolding learner engagement and literacy development.

## Good practice example 2: Kilkenny and Carlow ETB, the Friday Group

In Kilkenny and Carlow ETB, there are 2,031 adult literacy learners and 30 of these are family literacy learners. Table 5 below provides more detail on family literacy provision in this ETB in terms of hours, staffing, courses, accreditation options and so on.

*Table 5: Kilkenny and Carlow Family Literacy in numbers*

Category	Total
Total number of adult literacy learners	2,031
Total of family literacy learners	30
Family literacy hours per week	6
Paid family literacy tutor hours in 2017	218.75
Family literacy organiser hours in 2017	75
Family literacy courses in 2017	11
Hours of family literacy in 2017	218.75
Accredited options on offer	Yes
QQI Levels	3
Course completers	30
Progression to more learning	12

A partnership between a Kilkenny DEIS primary school and Kilkenny and Carlow ETB has evolved into a successful family learning group. The results are transformative for parents, children, the school and the wider community. Originally, provision for parents who were adult literacy learners took place in the adult learning centre. Organisers were aware of other parents who would find the prospect of joining a group in the centre daunting. With this in mind, they added the 'Friday Morning' slot in the school. The Friday Morning group is now a feeder for the group that meets in the Adult Learning Centre, which offers a wide range of QQI accredited modules from Level 2 to 4.

The Friday Morning group moved to a room in the school where the tutors and HSCL created a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Two tutors, one a craft specialist and the other an experienced literacy tutor, work every Friday morning with up to 16 women. The women are local parents and some newcomers from countries who have now settled in Kilkenny. There is tea and coffee and scones. The radio is playing in the background, and what had started as a small group has developed into a vibrant, highly successful family learning group.

*The cup of tea ... I think we underestimate the importance of the cup of tea. It is a great icebreaker. It settles everyone down. It relaxes new parents.*

*It's the best way to start a new term or project and also going out for a cup of tea at the end of term is the best way to finish it all off. A lot of planning and*

*feedback happens informally at these times. At one time we wondered about calling the group 'It all starts with a cup of tea'. KCETB AEO*

On the morning we visited the Friday Group the women were waiting to talk to us about their learning experience. The principal brought us to the room. There women and principal were laughing and there was some banter. The caretaker who provides tea slipped away when we arrived. It was not immediately clear who was a tutor and who was a family learner. There was a buggy with a sleeping child and other mothers had also brought their toddlers. Parents told us that by the time the toddlers went to school, they were settled well, as they were familiar with the school which made the transition to school easier.

### Ethos

KCETB espouses a clear family learning ethos that is parent-centered and egalitarian in practice. This ethos is articulated as, 'Parents are the first and most natural teachers of their children, and everyone is awarded the same opportunities regardless of cultural background.' This ethos was clear when we met the Friday Group. Everyone introduced themselves and listened respectfully to others. There was clarity about the goals of the group and pride in its achievements. The women felt very much at home in their children's school and were pleased with having found a way to be part of this family learning project. In later discussion with the AEO and ALO, we found that the ethos was firmly fixed throughout the area.

*Well, I suppose in Kilkenny centre we have a strong link with the schools, as you've experienced already, and also then there's a big strong family literacy ethos among the tutors and among coordinators, so that drives that ethos of family literacy and linking with the schools and the importance, I suppose, the importance of starting with the parents to get to target the young people, to, I suppose, probably work ourselves out of a job ultimately down the line because we're not going to have as much literacy issues. KCETB AEO*

As well as the relaxed atmosphere, we discovered that there was exceptional collaboration between the school and the ETB. This included identification of parents who might benefit from joining the group and close networking about the activities in which the group engaged. In later discussion with the school principal, we heard that the group had become a vital mechanism through which the school supported children whom they felt were struggling with some aspect of learning.

*It now is our way to support a child who needs support. It's one of our most important ways of doing it now ... because if we can get the parent on board there are a few other things start happening ... I notice it hugely ... the parents are much more comfortable coming to talk to me. They will attend parent teacher meetings now. Their children are good attenders*



*at school as a result. One of the teachers has set up literacy kits and maths kits for parents and they would be the parents now who would come in if she's doing a session and they would bring the stuff home and do it.* **DEIS School Principal**

The women in the Friday Group benefited individually and as a group from their time together. At the same time, other benefits accrued to their children, their family learning relationships, the work of the school and to the wider community.

## Collaboration

On a practical level, the family learning partnership is within the strategic goals of both the DEIS school and the ETB literacy service. Both have resources and expertise to share. Both are eager to provide meaningful learning opportunities for their participants. Family learning makes this possible.

*I suppose it's a combination. We would fund the book. We would fund the equipment that's needed for that. And that's part of our DEIS grant, because it's fulfilling the literacy and numeracy aspect. You see, with a DEIS school you have to have a literacy and numeracy plan, attendance plan, involvement of parents, and involvement of outside agencies. So it's hitting that brief.* **DEIS School Principal**

Encouraging participation in adult learning is the goal of the ETB, and the Friday Group is a means of engaging learners that is made accessible through their child's school. The women explained how they had come to join the group...

*I started here in September and my son is in the school here. I am happy because I have been able to know the ladies in this group. I am also learning more English here. I am seven years in Ireland and I want to learn more and more. Before I came to the group I did not know many people...now my son is in school here so I am in school now too! I come to an English class here too.* **Friday Group Member**

*I came because of the arts and crafts. For me, it was to get out of the house and to have time away from the kids as well. It's a break away and it's nice to meet new people.* **Friday Group Member**

Their child's teacher told various women about the group and others heard by word-of-mouth in and around the school campus. Events in the school are used to spread the word about the group, and group members see the value of the group and tell others about it.

*I heard about the class from a teacher in the school. She told me there was a parents group that met here on a Friday morning and that they made things for the classrooms ... My daughter loves it that I come down and that we made all the things for the classroom and she was telling all the other kids.* **Friday Group Member**

The Friday group offers clear benefits to parents who felt isolated and excluded. Parents in the group also focus more on their own learning while also attending to the literacy, numeracy and cultural development of their children. Family learning delivers on multiple levels.

## Family learning practice

By design, the activities of the family learning group are closely related to the life of the school. This seemingly simple approach means that the connection between the Friday Group parents and the life of the school produces maximum advantage for everyone. Each year, the Friday Group undertakes a number of projects related to the life and learning activities in the school. These are literacy related explicitly or in how they are applied. The group tutors discuss the current literacy focus in a particular age group and prepare complementary activities and materials with the Friday Group.

When the idea of storytelling using 'Big Books' was proposed, the ETB and the school held a workshop with the originator of Story Sacks – Neil Griffiths. These events were organised in conjunction with Kilkenny Adult Education Centre, Kilkenny Library and County Kilkenny Childcare Committee, each sharing the cost for the two days equally. The events were open to parents, other family members, library staff, teachers, tutors, childcare workers and children – who had a story telling session. The Friday Group subsequently became involved in preparing storytelling sessions for children and in making Story Sacks that contained props and other artefacts to enhance the delivery of the story.

*Every year then they look at a project. Now, what we've tried to do with literacy then is we've looked at what would the school like in terms of literacy that would assist us. So we have the Big Books that the parents did and they would have brought children down and read to them the stories. So that led to kind of storytelling at home.* **DEIS School Principal**

Inevitably the parents' involvement brought them into direct experience of their child's schoolwork, and this resulted in 'common ground' and setting aside time and space for a rich learning exchange. Parents' confidence increased, so they were able to better support their child's literacy development. Other benefits also ensued.

On another occasion, the school became aware that a number of children in a junior infant group had no bedtime routine, so, the Friday Group selected an appropriate story and devised a storytelling session about bedtime routines. The parents and their children benefitted from this session, as they used it at home to build a bedtime routine. The group also learned the importance of bedtime routine and sleep. The process of discussing and developing the story and the artefacts and the engagement with children in telling the story all contributed to cementing new practices for all involved.

Similarly, when hygiene arose as an issue, the Friday Group developed a routine for getting up in the morning, washing your face and teeth, and so on, and this was communicated creatively to the children. The use of literacy and the creative ways to communicate with children has boosted adults' skills.

Over time, the magnitude of these projects has developed. The school has a diverse community of parents and children, and it promotes respect and recognition of this multiculturalism. Each year, it holds an intercultural day with exchanges of cultural traditions, involving parents and children. The Friday Group developed a book to support this ethos, and it became a core vehicle for literacy and creativity. The result was a colourful children's book introducing 22 different nationalities that made up the school community. The book was launched on Intercultural Day and became a source of great pride for all involved. A quilt capturing much of the artwork prepared for the book now hangs in the school hall.

The approach to the group takes account of the demands on parents and the different levels of language and literacy amongst the women. The school prides itself on knowing its children and parents well. It encourages those in difficult circumstances or who are isolated to join the Friday Group. Some choose not to join, but the awareness and appeal of the group has grown.

*We're very flexible about timekeeping too. Mothers have a lot of demands on them in the mornings, lots of comings and goings. Like one mother, she drops her child here then walks up the road to the crèche then comes back down here again to the group.* **KCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

There is no pressure on members of the group to complete accredited modules, but the link with the adult learning centre facilitates those that do want to go down this route.

*But we do a lot of QQI modules. Just at Level 3. But last year we started doing a Level 4 just as a kind of a steppingstone, and it would be well supported. But the Level 3s they do the regular ones that, you know, that are relevant: nutrition and so on.* **KCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Tutors also consider learner progression. Learners may progress into a basic literacy group and ESOL class or, in some cases, a vocational course. The ETB element in the partnership facilitates progression along appropriate learning routes, and the established relationships mean that parents have a connection to further learning when they feel ready.

*By the end of the year, we nearly always have everyone linked into something else. It may be a one-to-one in literacy or something else. Some of the women go to the English class here ... we'd chat about that from early on.* **KCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

## Outcomes

### Children

We heard numerous stories about how parents were delighted by their child's response to their being in the school. They describe their own transformed status in their children's eyes and their pride at their parent's accomplishments. The mothers understand that they are part of a growing learning culture, and they cite evidence of increased family learning activities at home.

*The children are proud too! So, for my daughter now, the quilt that we did that is hanging up in the hall she loves telling her friends, 'My mum did that now.' So by parents learning – their kids are learning too. I do a lot of arts and crafts with my daughter at home now.* **Friday Group Member**

*When I get my child from school he asks me, 'Mama, what you do in school today?' I said to him, 'I make something nice for Halloween'. 'Something nice?' he said, 'Show me, show me!'. He asks me every week, 'What happens Mama?' He is happy I come here to his school.* **Friday Group Member**

Children gain a sense of belonging through being able to claim association with their parent's handiwork. School becomes more closely connected to family, and the alienation some children can feel in school is eliminated for children in the Friday Group. Parents are aware of the benefits from being part of a group. It helps them feel less isolated. The parents also know that their children benefit from them being in the school.

*Yes, my boys are very proud of me too that I am here in the school. They can say to others, 'My Mum made this and this and this here in school!' Like I showed them this book we are doing and they were so excited and that is good. Being here helps you to unwind too. I think it is important for the kids to know we are interested and involved in their schooling.* **Friday Group Member**

For one woman, the impact of family learning extends across a number of generations and illustrates that belief and encouragement in education is perhaps as important as academic achievement. Parents who have benefited little from the education system can still foster a positive view of education in their children. In the following case, the Friday Group has already reached three generations.

*My ones know that Fridays I go to school too, and they get very excited about that. My Mam left school at thirteen but we were all made to go to school. That was the rule! My Mam came back to college when I came back. She did a Level 5 in Healthcare. It was a big thing for her. She's out working in the healthcare sector now. Every year, she goes back and upgrades. My kids saw my mother going back and me going back.* **Friday Group Member**

## Parents

Besides the evidence of parents' gains in terms of bonding more with their children around school and learning, the data show that parents gain in other ways. Their own learning is enhanced and they find strength in the support of other parents. The sense of inclusion in the school was an impressive change for them too. They were impressed that they were now on first name terms with the head teacher and staff members. This made authority figures, whom they had previously felt intimidated by, much more approachable and will have an inevitable knock-on effect of more open communication regarding their children in the school.

*I'd feel more comfortable now if I had to approach the headmistress or one of the teachers here ... it would be more comfortable for sure. Before you wouldn't know what they were like ... and, they also get to know us and what kind of people we are. And the home schoolteacher is here every morning we meet. And now we are all on first name terms with one another so that's a change really. It's also a lovely atmosphere here.* **Friday Group Member**

Learning about education is incidental to the family learning process where content and pedagogical matters are discussed. For some, this opens up new areas of interest. We met and heard about a number of family learners who had become more ambitious as a result of their experience.

*She felt she didn't have—education got lost somewhere, you know. I mean, she had to work, go out to work early, and there wasn't a focus with her parents to educate her. Now, when she had her own children she realised, well, I want them to have a better advantage than I had. So she heard about the family learning —she heard in the school. So she said, 'Oh, I'll give that a try. I'm not going to stay but I'm going to give it a try. But I'm not going to stay.' She now wants to go on. And, she said just yesterday, 'I know I can now go onto further education. I want to become a tutor. I want to go into adult education. I want to get that degree and I can do it.' And that's what she said. And she said, 'I'm doing it.' So she said, 'Well, my computer skills are not the best, so in January myself and my husband we are going and we're doing a computer course as well.' She said, 'I'm going to need that to type up my assignments for College.'* **KCETB**

### Family Literacy Tutor

Family learning changes parents' lives and there is copious evidence of a multiplier effect in families and communities.

## School benefits

The principal of the DEIS primary school in Kilkenny highly praised the role of family learning in transforming the educational experience of children in her school. She was closely involved in the activities of the Friday

Group. This was not accidental. She purposively saw the group as a way of giving added support to families where it was needed. She cooperated closely with the ETB tutors and was involved in a range of collaborative social inclusion partnerships in the wider community.

She provided detailed evidence of the group's success in improving children's learning experiences both in school and at home. The Friday Group parents had become a positive and appreciated influence within the school.

*Well, what they're saying is that parents are more involved, you know, that they know that parents are doing the homework, they know that parents are reading the book with them, and they know that before those parents would — when the HSCL teacher would do a session on — you know, she's doing it now in junior infants — kits they could bring home with magnetic letters in it and different things they can do, games they can play around that. Those parents may not have been the parents who would have done that before, whereas now they would because they see the importance of literacy.*

### DEIS School Principal

The Friday Group parents had become those who could be depended upon to participate in school activities that supported literacy and numeracy development. Their participation in school-based literacy and numeracy activities had enabled their understanding and willingness to join in other school activities. The relationships of trust that have developed have eliminated parents' fears of being judged as wanting, and these parents now avail of all opportunities to support their children.

*Now, we also have the Reading Recovery programme in the school, so some of those children would be involved in that. And parents come in and observe that. And they can come in and observe as many times ... so those parents would now come in to observe. And then they can practise with the children afterwards. They learn that and any of the parents that come to the Friday Group would have a very good rate of involvement, you know?* **DEIS School Principal**

The Friday Group activities are no longer ancillary, they have become an integral and prized part of the annual school calendar.

*Now, the highlight of the school year is the Intercultural Day, and the highlight of that would be launching whatever project the Friday Group have done, every year.* **DEIS School Principal**

## Wider community outcomes

Family learning has a significant impact on the wider environment. The Friday Group in Kilkenny DEIS School has made an impression in a number of ways both in the national family literacy sector and in the Kilkenny area.

Parents from the Friday Group have addressed parents groups in the school and participated in a national NALA Family Literacy conference where they described their work.

Beyond the field of literacy and adult learning, the group's book on multiculturalism and the related wall hanging has attracted attention across the county. Their contribution to intercultural understanding is important in the group, in the school and in the wider society that sometimes struggles to find good role models for interculturalism.

*...and the success story as well is that the wall hanging, you'll see in the hall –that's gone to the County Council offices. It was displayed in Rothe House and in the library during Arts Week. It's on the Kilkenny People and one of the parents she spoke on Radio Kilkenny.* **DEIS School Principal**

*We did this book last year. There's an intercultural day here every year in the school and we launched the book at that. The Friday Group were all signing the book for their families and it was a really brilliant day. One of our famous hurlers launched the book. The work was on display in the local Council Offices and the group's pictures were in the paper!* **KCETB Family Literacy Tutor**

## Conclusion

This school-based programme provides an interesting contrast to the previous case study in that there is a more explicit emphasis on the literacy work of the school. Each case study was developed to match a different context and diverse adult learning needs. These are local choices made by a family literacy coordinator – as part of the collaborative design of a local family literacy strategy. Together, the case studies exemplify the merits of both approaches in dealing with intergenerational literacy learning, and they are indicative of the diversity that family literacy has to offer.

The Friday Group is an unassuming but impressive example of what family literacy and family learning can achieve when school literacy is the focus. It is rooted in caring and strategic relationships and mobilises what is best in people and learning systems to make a brighter and more inclusive future. Children, parents, the school and the community all benefit immeasurably from this DEIS-ETB partnership.

## Good practice example 3 - Waterford and Wexford ETB, engaging and retaining marginalised parents

In Waterford and Wexford ETB, there are 1,800 adult literacy learners and 180 of these are family literacy learners. Table 6 below provides more detail on family literacy provision in this ETB in terms of hours, staffing, courses, accreditation options and so on.

*Table 6: Waterford and Wexford ETB in numbers*

Category	Total
Total number of adult literacy learners	1,800
Total of family literacy learners	180
Family literacy hours per week	50
Paid family literacy tutor hours in 2017	800
Family literacy organiser hours in 2017	100
Family literacy courses in 2017	50
Hours of family literacy in 2017	600
Accredited options on offer	Yes
QQI Levels	1-3
Course completers	118
Progression to more learning	39

Family learning tends to promote an image of close affective relationships where smiling parents and contented children participate in fun learning. This is often the case, and during our fieldwork we have seen ample examples of such excellent learning practices. We have also repeatedly heard about the difficulty that ETBs have in attracting 'target', 'reluctant' or 'hard-to-reach' adults whose prior learning experiences and present life circumstances keep learning low on their personal and family agenda. No family learning is ever wasted, but there are priorities of need. Often, trusting relationships with community organisations, help services to contact those in greatest need.

WWETB work closely with Focus Ireland and Respond to provide for learners experiencing homelessness and mental health issues – issues that make it harder for learners to be consistent in how they deal with family learning demands. In New Ross, we met with a group of learners, women and men, and their tutor and discussed the benefits they had reaped from family learning and their advice for attracting others in from the margins.

## Ethos

WWETB does not have a defined family literacy ethos, but it operates a learner-centred provision that aims to engage adult learners and support them to identify their own learning trajectory. A community development perspective is clear in the data with requests from a host of agencies being positively received and responded to collaboratively. The AEO made it clear that they work from a socially situated view of literacy and carry this through to their family learning provision.



*The WWETB endeavours to offer a broad range of subjects in order to encourage those with the lowest levels of literacy to engage with the Service. In this context, the word Literacy is used in the broadest sense. This helps to avoid the stigma, which some people attach to it and helps to overcome earlier negative educational experience.*

#### **WWETB AEO**

We met with a family learning tutor who exemplified the success of this approach. She had begun as a family literacy learner and progressed to qualify as a family learning tutor. Her empathy with the learners was evident and, her relationship with them is based on a special and recent understanding of the learner experience.

*Because I came through the same journey, I understand where learners are. I don't judge anyone. I struggled myself and when I went back to education at fifty my knees were shaking. I don't know how I went in through the door that first day. I take that into consideration, and I'm also aware that I am learning from people as well. I have four different groups I do cooking with. A lot of my groups are people who aren't working. They like the homeliness of the classes. The atmosphere is very good during classes. The last thing you need is a school type environment when it is your first time coming back.* **WWETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Inevitably learners appreciated this tutor's approach, as it helped them to feel relaxed and receptive to learning.

*That's a big change for me too... when we were young education was completely different. There was no connection between the teachers and the pupils. It's far more relaxed now.* **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

One man had tried a number of mainstream classes with different tutors before settling with this particular tutor. His reasons for not staying in two previous classes were discomfort that he had not made his literacy issues known to tutors, and he rapidly became lost in both the computer class and cookery class he had joined. He told us he felt liberated by the adult learning ethos and the recognition and respect he experienced when his tutor understood his issues.

*Yeah and it's not so strict, you can have a laugh but you also learn and you do take it serious. It's not like we are in class, sitting down. We're adults and we're treated like adults.* **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

## Collaboration

WWETB works with a large number of agencies mostly in an *ad hoc* manner. There is no family learning coordinator, but part of the role of the Adult Literacy Organiser is to make contact with every agency in their area where some form of literacy support may be needed. Work is also ongoing with some DEIS schools HSCL teachers, HSE and Waterford Institute of Technology. WIT has a module of Family Literacy tutor training is well established.

WWETB, like all ETBs, has a protocol with the library and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP), where formal meetings and reviews take place at AEO and director level. WWETB is represented by the AEO at the interagency refugee meetings in the county where ESOL/Literacy plans, including ESOL family learning activities, are discussed.

Discussions acknowledged the contribution of partnership agencies to the smooth running of family learning.

*But, I mean, a lot of the programmes wouldn't succeed without the supports of the agencies. And you do need the agencies maybe to encourage, you know, send around a text message the night before to say, look, you know, remember class is going on at 9 o'clock in the morning, whatever.*

#### **WWETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Focus Ireland and Respond Facebook pages were cited as evidence of how social media can be a useful point of information exchange. With more than a hundred users, the page is an important means of engaging new learners through a trusted community of practice.

## Family learning practice

Some of the family learners we met told us of **additional difficulties** they had in returning to learning. These included mental health issues. They knew what they were expected to do – learn, progress and move into employment. However, they were painfully aware of how their **mental health issues** made them afraid to hope for this outcome and they felt limited by their issues.

*When you're on your own it's hard, and it's not nice being labelled. 'You're on the dole and your child is old enough and you should be out working', but they don't know what a mental health patient goes through on a daily basis. I wish I had the confidence to go out and work and to make sure my child is ok but when you do your medical card gets taken off you and your rent goes up and it's difficult if you are married or in a relationship you know ... and it's embarrassing going down and collecting your money in a small town ... queuing up outside the post office and everyone knowing your business. You're labelled and I hate that. I don't want to suffer with my mental health. I want to make sure my kids are ok and looked after ... sorry I get a bit emotional.* **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

From the outset, family learning providers were careful to assure people that engagement in learning would entail **no hidden costs**. Even the fear of hidden costs can mean a learner doesn't return the second week.

*So like the first days of family learning we would actually outline, you know, that say if it was held on nutrition, like, that we'd provide the ingredients. All those kind of things that will actually encourage them to come back.* **WWETB Family Literacy Tutor**

Learners, in turn, described being given a positive introduction to a particular tutor by friends - and finding the experience with that tutor life changing. From a position of isolation and unmet literacy needs, one learner became engaged in a family cookery class. She felt more confident working on literacy and became conscious of her ability to learning and the new skills she was acquiring. Paramount in all of this was the basic capacity to leave the home and become integrated in a supportive learning environment.

*I'm the type of person who stays home, you know? I'm not good at reading or writing. I joined the family learning class and with her you don't have to read anything ... she'd help you along and explain everything and how to do this or that. Sometimes there is writing, but I'm kind of getting confident with that now ... and she's with you every step of the way, and I can read the scales now ... and I could never do that before. I just love it ... getting out and going down there. It's like home from home when you go over there!* **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

The level of empathy that the tutor showed during these very personal exchanges was telling. She integrates literacy and numeracy where she can, but, most importantly, she is consciously and effectively scaffolding personal esteem and igniting a new learner identity. There are material benefits too in the cookery class. The parents also get to take home what they cook, which is often a treat!

*I'm in school with the parents and they have school going children. I came from a catering background. I like to get stuck in and to try and find 'teachable moments'. I work the literacy of cooking into the classes. We all eat together at the end of a session, and we evaluate it and prepare for the coming week.* **WWETB Family Literacy Tutor**

*And we all agree that together. And we take home leftovers and the kids have that and they tell their friends about it especially when I make buns!* **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

Learners explained the factors that inhibit their participation in adult learning, and how easily it is to put off by their own lack of resources or even fear of being unable to meet hidden costs. Those parenting alone were limited by childcare demands and the timing of courses.

*A lot of people I've spoken to say childcare are the main issue. They have young kids and they can't get to classes because of that. Also the registration form is a bit personal you know? I don't know why they need our PPS numbers. I think that is personal.* **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

*Times, childcare, cost ... they all stop me. I have no one else to depend on. Her father passed away, and I have to be there for her when she comes home ... and, I can't afford childcare to go to a class ... and so that means I can't go unless the times suit.* **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

## Outcomes

Despite sizeable barriers to reengaging with learning, the people we met had positive things to say about their social, health and learning outcomes. The data strengthen the evidence that **all** parents want the very best for their children and to have a better life than their own. The gains in one woman's life were clear: family learning outcomes in terms of modelling good learning practices with her daughter, increasing her love and interest in school and intensifying the amount of family learning activity. The relationship between parent and child is also stronger and more joyful. Nonetheless, she qualifies all this with regret that she cannot, as socially expected, become a breadwinner at this time.

*I honestly don't have the confidence to work at the moment. I do suffer with my mental health. Seeing my little one happy at me going out - doing it - means a lot to me. The meals I've made here I've made at home with my daughter, and she loves it and we're doing it together and I wouldn't have been able to do that unless I went to the classes and it gives me quality time with her.*

*And she loves school now, and I think I have given her more interest in it. She doesn't miss a day. I'm trying to encourage her. I left school very young and it's now that I'm regretting it so I don't want her to feel that ... I want her to see the good side.* **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

The challenge for children in having a parent, and possibly a lone parent, with mental health issues can impair their entire life experience, including the ability to deal with the demands of school. Engaging those with mental health issues and multiple disadvantages in family learning can transform the lives of children and parents in ways that are difficult to capture in annual returns. One mother described the layers of satisfaction prompted by her return to family learning.

*My little one was delighted. I started the cooking ... she asks me when I go out to ask the teacher to make fairy cakes. She'd be really excited you know, and it's great for her to see that mammy wasn't just sitting at home doing nothing and that I was out.* **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

The school remarked on the increased presence of one mother in the school and her obvious involvement in her child's learning. Others were aware of parents who, through family learning programmes, had begun volunteering as a Reading Buddy in school, joined the school Management Board or merely being seen more often in the community. These were signs of family learning success that the learners had witnessed first-hand.

The wider cultural shift that takes place in families means that family learning is impacting on cycles of educational disadvantage, and, where successful, family learning disrupts these cycles.

*It [family learning] encourages parents to be more proactive with their children's education and to be more involved in what they're doing. And, I think that has a long-term impact. I think it is that modelling behaviour as well. If they see their parents doing something, they see their parents engaging with material and resources and things like that, and that becomes part of their everyday lives. It's just accepted, you know.* **WWETB Literacy Worker**

*Family learning had produced a whole range of outcomes in the lives of groups of learners. Their sense of personal achievement and the impact on their relationship to their children's learning development is evident. While for some the steps back to learning may be faltering, others have become firmly engaged as adult lifelong learners who would like more learning opportunities in the week and whose sense of well-being is positively affected. I'd love if there were more classes for me during the week. It really benefitted me and my mental health.* **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

These learners' affirmation was clear in their instinct to spread the word more widely about such learning opportunities and the power they hold to transform marginalised lives.

*I feel like there isn't enough information out there about what is happening. Maybe it's there and I'm not hearing it? I think mental health is a big topic now and there's a lot of people suffering with it and there should be more there for people now than just going to the doctor and having tablets thrown at you. The best answer is getting out and learning, meeting people and building confidence.* **WWETB Family Literacy Learner**

## Conclusion

Much like the previous two case studies, in WWETB the learned-centred ethos of family learning provision provides the solid foundation from which every other aspect of the programme can then develop and thrive. An emphasis on the affective dimension of learning encourages learners to come, take part, persist and flourish. Learners who very often face multiple and complex barriers to learning are supported both with sound adult learning principles and relevant learning and also, most importantly, empathy and care from tutors, organisers, centre staff and peers.

Protocols for interagency cooperation, coupled with the efforts of ETBs staff and other relevant agencies, are managing to reach adults and their families with most to gain from a family learning programme. WWETB shows both ingenuity and tenacity in developing and maintaining these links.

The visit to WWETB and discussions with learners and WWETB staff provided rich evidence of the wider impacts of adult learning for the learner themselves, their family, schools and communities.

## Summary remarks on case studies

**Family learning is effective** in engaging learners who have not hitherto participated in lifelong learning. Once engaged, these parents respond well to the adult learning approach commonly used in the literacy scheme. Some family learning offers the possibility of accreditation from Levels 1-3, which can be a popular option with learners, particularly those without qualifications. Taking part in adult learning upgrades parents' skills. Many progress to other courses and some move into employment training or work. All of this activity is in line with active inclusion policy and goals and might be able to deliver further on these targets with a more supportive structure and increased investment.

There is clear evidence that family learning delivers on the objectives of positively impacting children's experience of school, the benefits they derive from education and the development of their learning identity. This evidence was collected from family learners, their tutors, HSCL teachers and a head teacher. The researchers were fortunate to participate in some learning activities and so we were also able to talk to some children who affirmed the evidence already given.

The case studies elaborate **key aspects** of family learning:

- how to use an integrated approach to literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in family learning activities,
- how to reap maximum benefit from partnerships between a DEIS School, the HSCL teacher and the ETB literacy service, and
- how to use family learning activities to crucially engage and retain the most marginalised adult learners.

This case study evidence helps to sketch the national picture of family learning in ETBs in some detail. It also reflects some of the ways this approach to lifelong learning can become even more valuable for active inclusion.

## Key messages about evidence of family literacy in practice

### Evidence shows that family literacy works

There is strong evidence that family literacy in ETBs is effectively engaging parents with literacy issues, retaining them in courses, supporting them in achieving a range of outcomes and enabling them to move on to further learning or employment.

### Engaging people with unmet literacy needs in family literacy takes time and partners

Engagement of those with unmet literacy needs in family literacy is a lengthy process that requires additional time and is greatly facilitated by working in partnership with other community stakeholders. The HSCL teacher in a DEIS school is a pivotal partner in developing family literacy. Community action groups enable links to be made with the most disadvantaged learners.

### Family literacy is most effective when it has an adult learning ethos

Family literacy delivery works best when it is informed by an adult learning ethos. A themed or integrated approach is effective and tutor skills are key to retaining learners. Parent solidarity contributes significantly to retention.

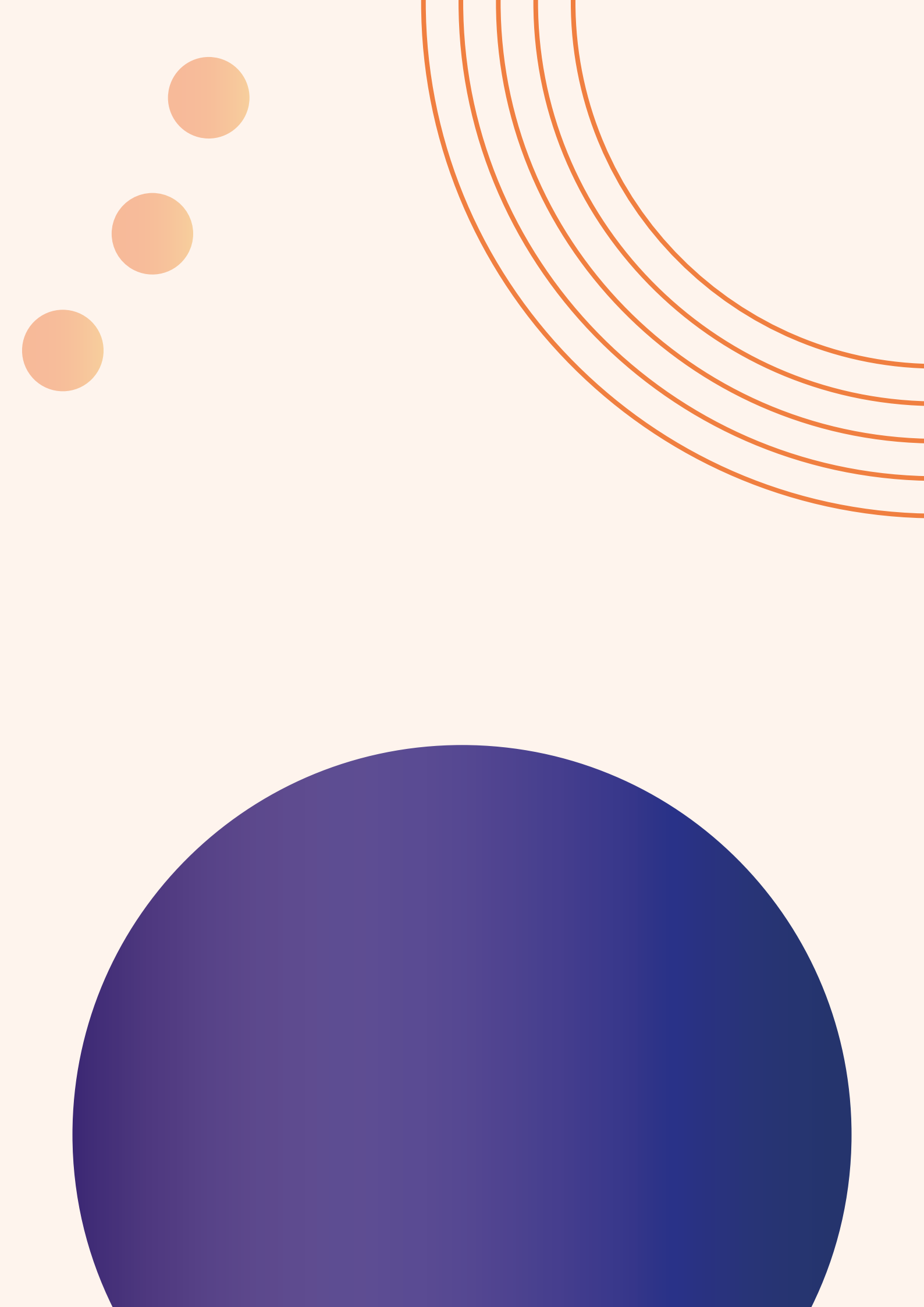
### Family literacy outcomes benefit all

Outcomes from family literacy benefit parents, children, schools and communities. A new culture of parental inclusion develops in schools where family literacy takes place.

### Family learning promotes progression

Many learners progress from family literacy to other courses. Some feel able to move towards vocational training – and others into work. Most feel more confident and have a greater understanding of their role as facilitator of their child's learning.





# Where do we go from here?

## Reflection and local revision

ETBs are invited to take time with the guidelines and case studies. The guidelines are not written to make ETBs busier or to have more boxes to tick. Instead, it is hoped, that they underpin and reflect current good practice while at the same time offering scope to ETBs to think about certain aspects of their family literacy practices both now and into the future. These guidelines should serve as a blue-print for family literacy and they exist to support the development of local family literacy strategies based on local needs, resources and priorities.

As with any area of adult learning, there is additional work to be done – much of which falls outside of the learning setting. This work is essential to future-proof a strong family literacy focus in FET and is set out below as a series of recommendations. These recommendations will form the basis for an implementation plan for family literacy in FET.

## Recommendations for FET sector on extending and strengthening family literacy

### 1. Collaboration

#### 1.1 Promote interdepartmental collaboration

An interdepartmental government group that is concerned with family literacy objectives should be set up to steer the development of national family literacy policy. The group should be representative of practitioners and community stakeholders. They should be family-literacy champions and encourage the equality outcomes that intergenerational learning can deliver.

#### 1.2 Build collaborative family literacy partnerships

To facilitate a more systematic approach to family literacy, core collaborative family literacy partnerships should be built. These would allow FET, DEIS, public libraries and CYPSCs to develop provision that harnesses all their skills, resources and contacts with parents who will most benefit from family literacy. These core groups should meet with other stakeholders and develop a local, needs-based family literacy strategy. Other stakeholders will need to participate less frequently and as local circumstances dictate. The partnership building process should be meaningfully resourced and supported.

#### 1.3 Collect data about local family literacy partnerships

Data collection about local family literacy collaborative partnerships should gather information about all elements of the partnerships:

- engagement in adult learning,
- measured and observed impacts in schools,
- changes in use of public libraries, and
- observed impacts on families using CYPSCs services.

#### 1.4 Establish a national repository for family literacy resources

A national repository should be established for family literacy research, learning resources and course outlines. These can be shared amongst practitioners. The ETBI digital library which is currently being developed may form part of this facility.

#### 1.5 Develop a digital hub

A digital hub to facilitate tutor and learner dialogue should be established.



## 2. Planning and delivery

### 2.1 Focus provision on literacy content

Whether it is called family literacy or family learning, the essence of provision should be literacy focussed in content and intergenerational in the scope of learning.

### 2.2 Ensure an equitable spread of programmes

ETB strategic planning should ensure that family literacy is available to interested parents and schools across the catchment area. Those in greatest need should be prioritised where limited resources do not allow all requests to be answered.

### 2.3 Facilitate meaningful and constructive evaluation

Recognition of the long engagement process into literacy learning should be recognised when evaluating and measuring family literacy.

### 2.4 Value strengths-based and learner-centred approaches

The Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024 should continue to emphasise the value of strengths-based and learner-centred approaches to learning. This ethos should be recognised and articulated as the underpinning culture of family literacy.

### 2.5 Provide adequate resourcing

Family literacy coordination and delivery should be adequately resourced. All ETBs suggested ring-fenced funding for family literacy. This is something to be addressed between ETBs and SOLAS. Data should be collected as a separate category from other literacy provision. This will provide evidence to inform future planning.

### 2.6 Honour learner ambitions

Accreditation should remain an optional aspect of family literacy. Measures of the 'soft skills' that family literacy facilitates should be developed and used to build evidence about diverse and unmeasured outcomes. Those wishing to develop family literacy accreditation should be supported and resourced to do so.

### 2.7 Keep knowledge and evidence fresh

Ongoing research and evidence gathering is needed about family literacy/intergenerational learning (where possible as part of wider

longitudinal studies). Studies might usefully include:

- the impact of home-based family literacy,
- the gendered nature of learning care work,
- the impact of homelessness on family literacy practices, and
- how to ensure the greater inclusion of other underrepresented groups.

## 3. Training and development

### 3.1 Continuing professional development for core partners

Continuing professional development (CPD) about childhood and adult learning should be available to core partner members so that they better understand the nature of their collaborative task.

### 3.2 Training for all family literacy staff

All family literacy staff should have ongoing access to training and support for the development of innovative approaches to integrated literacy and themed family literacy.

## Suggestions for further research

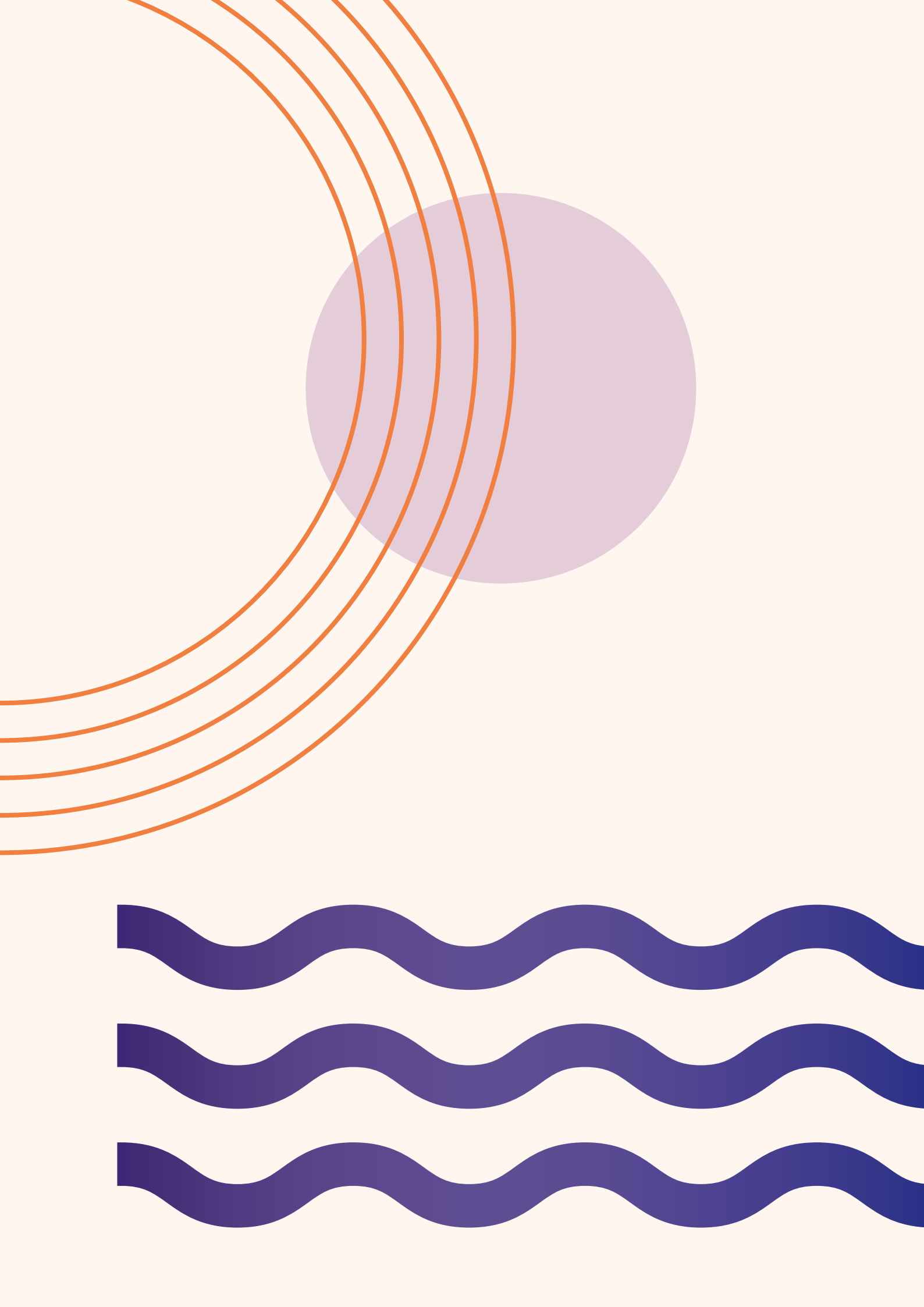
Future studies could usefully build upon this project and use full and verifiable data from the PLSS system to create a complete map of family literacy provision within the further education and training sector. Although this project focussed on adult aspects of family literacy within the ETBs, future collaborative research could extend to include core family literacy partners such as DEIS schools, public libraries, and CYPSCs. The working of structured collaborative partnership activity is worthy of further examination. An expanded research project might create a broader picture of the impacts of family literacy on parents, children, schools, and the wider community.

A study of family literacy practice within families would also provide useful information to inform good practice in the learning content of family literacy provision within further education and training.

*Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.*  
(Paulo Freire, 1972: 3)







# Appendix 1

## Synopsis of research approach and limitations

### Key terms and definitions

#### Family literacy

In this document, and the larger background report that accompanies it, the term 'family literacy' is understood to include oral and written language (both Irish and English), numeracy and digital literacy. It also includes the broader skills of facilitating learning where parents, carers and siblings learn how to explain new skills and concepts to each other.

*Family literacy describes the uses of literacy and numeracy within families and communities, especially activities that involve two or more generations. Family literacy also denotes education programmes that help to develop literacy and numeracy learning in a family context. NALA, 2004: 8*

The terms 'family literacy' and 'family learning' are used in the FET sector to describe activities aimed at enhancing the learning opportunities of parents and their children. An inclusive and situated understanding of literacy favours **family literacy as a term** in that that embraces both specific literacy skills and their application in a host of social and cultural circumstances (Hamilton et al, 2000).

### Research methods

The background research captured both quantitative and qualitative data about current family literacy practice in further education and training. Desk-based research established the national and international theoretical and policy context in which family literacy takes place, while the survey collected quantitative and related administrative data about the provision of family literacy for the full calendar year 2017.<sup>7</sup> The quantitative data was supplemented by in-depth interviews and case studies with ETB managers, tutors, learners and stakeholder partners.

Three case studies of good practice were developed from the visits to the ETBs in question: KCETB, LCETB, and WWETB. These three ETBs were selected to exemplify different types of provision. Excellent family literacy

provision was observed in all ETBs visited over the course of the research project, of which the three case studies are representative. The case studies presented here were presented in draft format to the ETBs in question and were verified by the respective ETBs.

Data captured during the course of this project – quantitative and qualitative – has been anonymised to protect the identity of ETB staff, tutors, individual learners, and other stakeholders.

### Limitations of the research

#### Timeframe

The timeframe in which to conduct the background research on family literacy was limited to six months for the initial desk-based research, fieldwork, and write-up stages of the project. Therefore, these guidelines are limited to, and representative of, the data collected and analysed within this short period. As a result, any omissions are due exclusively to the timeframe for this project, which presents only a small sample of the breadth of excellent family literacy provision currently in operation nationwide.

#### Scope

This project was limited to family literacy provision by ETBs within the further education and training sector. This provision is often conducted in partnership with a number of other stakeholders including, but not limited to: primary schools, the DEIS school initiative, local libraries, the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, and community health nurses.

This research project was also limited to examining family literacy practice within educational environments and not family learning practices within the home or beyond. Moreover, the family literacy programmes discussed here are primarily aimed at adult learners, whereas other family literacy programmes are based on a parent-child blended model of provision.

While the section on family literacy in context will help situate Irish provision within a broader national and international framework, it is beyond the remit of this study to examine international family literacy policy or practice in any extensive detail.

#### Quantitative data

In the six months available for the study, researchers engaged in some detail with every ETB and mapped national family literacy activities for the first time. While researchers have collected full and rich qualitative data, the quantitative data is limited for a number of reasons.

- Family literacy was not a separate data category on the FET data system in 2017, and figures provided by AEOs reflect their own records of local practice.
- In some cases where staff roles had changed, local and institutional knowledge was incomplete.

<sup>7</sup> 2017 was the most recent complete calendar year for returns of further education and training provision available when the research project was commissioned.

The numerical survey data are, therefore, indicative rather than verifiably accurate. They are the best overview possible in the absence of a rigorous data record.

- Personal identity data, once entered into the PLSS data system, become unavailable to ETB personnel. Some ETBs were able to provide data from their own records and others were not.

Nevertheless, a reasonably full indicative mapping of ETB family literacy activities emerged.

## The policy context

The larger background report that accompanies these guidelines provides a wealth of information on policy development around family literacy and wider family support initiatives over the past number of decades. Below is a synopsis of some of significant policy developments to impact on family literacy. These include policies with global / European reach and those devised at national level.

### United Nations

Under the United Nations 2030 Agenda, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) the provision of quality, inclusive education can help equip people with the tools required to 'develop innovative solutions to the world's greatest problems'. SDG 4.6 states that by 2030 they wish to 'ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy'.<sup>8</sup> The strategic **framework for European cooperation in education and training** (ET 2020) is also concerned with guiding EU Member States to advance educational policy reforms at the national level. European and wider global commitment to education is considered a means of combating disadvantage and enhancing literacy levels across the board.

### European Union

Irish policy reflects the framework for cooperation agreed by EU Member States under ET2020. The common strategic framework sets targets for a range of areas in the inclusive education strand, including basic skills, early childhood education, and participation in lifelong learning. Core childhood and adult educational policy has a strong focus on improving levels of literacy and family literacy programmes are a critical component in achieving this goal.

## National

In 2000, the DES published 'Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education' in which family literacy was recognised as an established model for inclusive, community-based education. The White Paper proposed an expansion of learning activities that support parents in their role as primary educators of their children.

In 2005, the Delivery of Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative was launched by the Department of Education and Skills to provide additional resources in primary and secondary schools in areas of disadvantage. DEIS built upon the successful work of the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme and their drive to build collaborative partnerships with parents to support children's learning. Once again, family literacy programmes were recognised as an important constituent for enhancing participation in education for children and parents in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Moreover, the DES 'National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People 2011-2020' and the subsequent strategy review document (2017) include a commitment to enabling parents to support children's literacy through family literacy initiatives.

The Department of Education and Skills Operational Guidelines (2012) specify that literacy is fundamental to personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability.<sup>9</sup> The priority target cohorts for Adult Literacy programmes are adults with less than upper second level education, or whose literacy and numeracy do not match those at NFQ Level 3, and that these learners must be prioritised.<sup>10</sup> The Operational Guidelines outline the following six programmes that fall under the remit of adult literacy provision in the further education and training sector:

- Intensive Adult Basic Education (ITABE).
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).
- Family Literacy.
- Workplace Literacy.
- Skills for Work.
- Adult Refugee Programme.

To date, family literacy provision in ETBs has been encompassed within wider adult literacy provision. These guidelines are intended for providers of family literacy and adult literacy services, and within the wider further education and training sector.

The SOLAS 'Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019' also recognises the need for family literacy to address the unmet literacy and numeracy needs for adults and children in Ireland.

8 United Nations, 'Sustainable Development Goal 4', *Sustainable Development Goals* (2015) [Accessed 13 March 2019].

9 Department of Education and Science is now the Department of Education and Skills (DES).

10 Department of Education and Science, 'Adult Education Guidance Initiative: Operational Guidelines' (2012), p. 28.

## VEC/ETB advancements in family literacy 1990 – present

The following are some of the key publications that have given an overview of good practice in family literacy over the last thirty years.

### 1990s

- 1994: Work on family learning begins in Clare with just a few community-based courses per annum.
- Offaly VEC began a family learning course that was based on the Parental Involvement Project (PIP) Early Intervention Initiative. This programme later became the basis for tutor training sessions and a model for similar adult literacy programmes run in a number of counties.
- The Dublin Adult Learning Centre in collaboration with the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education began a programme called *Read to Succeed*, designed to help parents understand the benefits of reading to children. The course was accredited for participants through the Northern Ireland Open College Network (NIOCN) while tutors also had the opportunity to complete an accredited training module.

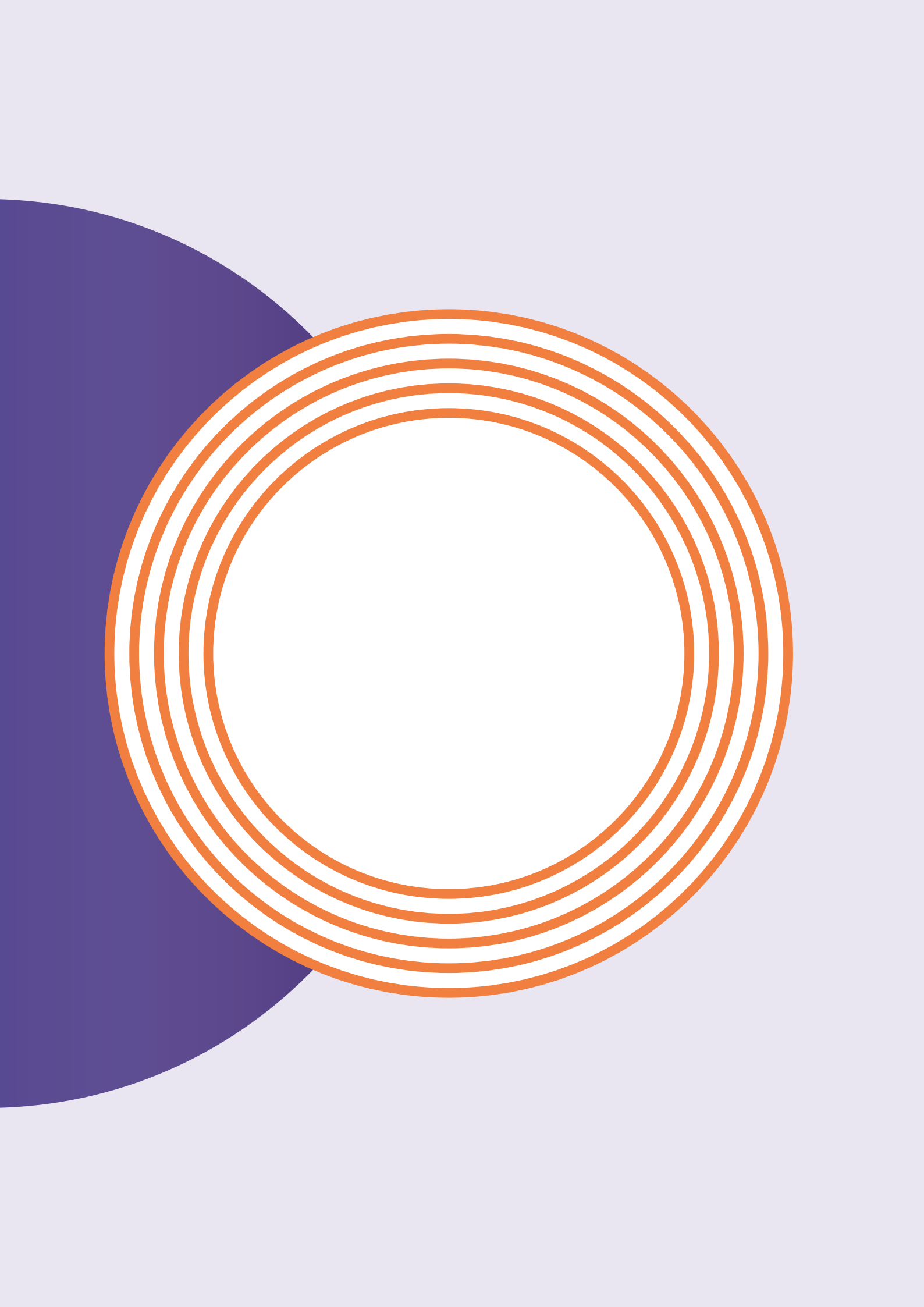
### 2000s

- 2000: Clare Family Learning Project published their comprehensive *Family Learning Resource Guide*. The resource guide explained the rationale for family literacy and also shared materials and expertise developed through their years of practice in the area.
- 2002: County Dublin VEC adult literacy service published a *Staff Handbook on Family Learning*, as well as a course model of a two-stage programme for parents.
- 2004: NALA and the Family Literacy Working Group (2003-2004) published *Working Together: Approaches to Family Literacy*, a comprehensive overview and guidelines for family literacy work.
- 2009: Clare Family Learning Project published *Family Learning Programmes in Ireland*, a guide detailing family literacy activities in each county in Ireland.
- 2010: the DES and DEIS Family Literacy Committee produced *Guidelines for Providers* designed to help practitioners funded under the department's DEIS Family Literacy Initiative.
- 2013: a DES review of provision in Adult Literacy and Community Education Schemes (ALCES) found that intensive literacy and numeracy (ITABE) and family literacy were valuable interventions but reportedly under-resourced; provision was also found to be inconsistent across regions.

Each of the sixteen ETBs makes literacy and numeracy provision available locally, which includes one-to-one and group courses, as well as blended learning and family literacy. An integrated approach to literacy and numeracy is important throughout the FET sector and across all programmes given that levels of literacy and numeracy can vary significantly.

Some examples of current family literacy initiatives across Ireland include:

- Dads and Lads
- Digital Stories
- Families Reading Every Day (FRED)
- Family Health
- Family Learning and Irish
- Learning the Language of School
- The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) "Doodle Den" and "Doodle Families"
- Happy Talk
- Young Ballymun "Ready, Steady, Grow" and "Write Minded"
- Dolly Parton Imagination Library (not yet commenced).



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11 Complete references for this project can be found in the Background Report completed by Dr Maggie Feeley and Dr Ann Hegarty











