

READ DL - For the Love of Reading in Donegal



READ DL, based on the worldwide 'One Book, One Community'* projects began life in 2012 as READ LK aiming to create an awareness of reading and promote literacy within Letterkenny schools and community. The initial project set out to encourage the people of Letterkenny to read the same book/author, thus contributing to a sense of community and to encourage the pupils of 4th, 5th and 6th Classes in Letterkenny Educate Together National School and all 1st Year students in Errigal College to read the one book.

The Initiative expanded to the whole county of Donegal in 2014 to READ DL and revamped its aims to be/include:

1. A countywide movement centred on reading and gaining or re-gaining a love for reading
2. A countywide initiative with local events

Its continuing purpose is to remind us about the joy of reading for all the family and to encourage local communities to read.

READ DL is an annual time limited literacy initiative. It runs in schools, community venues and Youth Reach facilities for 6 weeks each spring but the administration of the project begins in September the previous year. Committee members meet from September to April. The target groups of the initiative include senior classes in primary schools, first year students in post primary schools and adults re-discovering the love of reading. The aim is to have a book in students' homes. For some that may be a first!

The book chosen each year determines the events and activities for that year.

Read DL is a multiagency committee led by coordinators from Errigal College, Letterkenny Educate Together NS, Donegal ETB, LYIT, Donegal County Council Library Service, Health Promotion HSE West and the Workhouse, Dunfanaghy. The success of the Project can be attributed to the strength of the cooperation between the disparate organisations. Good working relationships have been established with the common aim of building a sense of community while promoting the value of reading and literacy.

Each member promotes the initiative as part of their work and the Donegal Education Centre is our link for advertising the initiative with primary and second level school in the county. Community Based venues such as local libraries also host events and activities for the reading period each year as well as advertising the initiative on www.donegallibrary.ie and in their local library. Schools have included the project as part of their school DEIS plans under their school literacy strategy.

There is no specific funding linked or ring fenced for READ DL but with the co-operation of each agency involved taking on a piece of the work the whole project somehow takes shape each year! The local Institute of Technology, LYIT (Letterkenny) kindly sponsors the purchase of the books and each school is charged €2 per book.

Local Donegal County Councillors donate funding from their members allocation. Read DL was also part of the Donegal 1916 Commemoration Programme.

READ DL facilitates local exhibitions, countywide competitions and workshops around the book each year. Events to date have included; a 500 word themed short story competition, a 6 word creative

writing competition on the READ DL Facebook page, local mystery readers visiting schools, storytelling workshops for parents, animation workshops in schools, giant table quizzes, visits to local folklore sites, visits by speakers to schools, drama workshops, reading and recitals performed in residential settings for older people and book clubs.

By Bringing schools together for this initiative, the knock on affect has been that new joint co-operative initiatives based on the school curriculum have emerged with visits and outings and projects together. Schools have also gained additional access to personnel from the various agencies involved in the project.

A significant feature about our project is that the Closing Ceremony each year is held in a community venue and hosted by local school children who act as comperes and MC's for the evening. Members of the committee help prepare them for this role.

In 2012, the book chosen was written by Ireland's first Children's Laureate, Siobhan Parkinson. Siobhan launched the initiative at the Central Library on World Book Day. 2013's chosen book was written by Eoin Colfer, the best-selling children's author. Charlie Bird, formerly RTE, launched the project also at the Central library. (Eoin Colfer joined us via Skype!). a local author and storyteller, Joe Brennan, launched READ DL 2014 and it was his book of short stories, 'Donegal Folk Tales' that was chosen for that year. In 2015, the book chosen was 'Wonder' by RJ Palacio and launched by Sean O'Rourke from RTE. READ LK & READ DL have always been linked with World Book Day each year. In 2016, in keeping with the commemoration of the 1916 Rising, the chosen book was the graphic novel, 'Blood upon the Rose' by Gerry Hunt and launched by Frank McNally from the *Irish Times* in the Central library Letterkenny. Read DL featured as part of the many events taking place in the Donegal 1916 commemoration programme.

Members of the committee ensure that all that is needed is provided such as badges, posters, advertising, notepads, contacting and booking speakers, artists, workshops, venue hire and refreshments for opening and closing ceremonies, etc. The Donegal County Council Library Service provides multiple copies of the chosen book in its libraries, a Read DL Blog on its website, meeting rooms in kind and hosts the opening ceremony each year. The Donegal ETB provides the prizes for our writing competitions.

The Dept. of Education & Science (DES) National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 addresses six key areas aimed at improving literacy and numeracy outcomes. The first one mentioned is to *"enable parents and communities to support children's literacy and numeracy development"*.

The National Strategy also sets a series of targets for improving literacy and numeracy standards. One that stands out for the committee of READ DL is that we would, *"foster an enjoyment of reading among children and young people"*. READ DL goes some way to ensuring that families have a book at home.

In 2014, the project was awarded a Donegal ETB award in the 'Co-Operation with Local Organisations' category.

**The "One Book, One Community" initiatives are designed to bring local people together through reading and discussing the same book/author. The objective of the project is to get as many people reading a book from a particular author at the same time, therefore building a sense of community while also promoting literacy.*