



Impact Report

City of Dublin ETB x MoLI Museums as Adult-Friendly Learning Spaces

Supported by the Arts Council of Ireland and ALL,
Adult Literacy for Life Fund.

Museums and Literature for **Everyone?**



Ireland has produced four Nobel Prize winners in Literature. Yet around one in six adults aged 16 to 65 struggles with literacy, scoring at or below Level 1 on a five point scale. At this level, people may find it hard to understand basic written information.

This raises a simple question. How can MoLI, a museum of literature, and CDETB South Inner City Adult Education services respond through the arts, using the written and spoken word?

We also have to listen. What do adult learners tell us they need from a museum? And how can we use their feedback to create an experience that is accessible, enjoyable, and welcoming for everyone, whatever their literacy level?

Why Literacy?

Literacy touches every aspect of our lives and has a great influence on our well-being. It is more than reading and writing. It's being able to understand, use and act on information. It involves listening, speaking and using everyday technology and the internet to communicate and handle information.

Literacy allows us to fully engage in society and be active citizens. It provides us with opportunities and is essential to developing an equal society.

Literacy is a human right.

- <https://www.adultliteracyforlife.ie/what-is-all/>

Overview of this report

 **Museums as welcoming learning spaces for adults**

 **Supporting adult learning and wellbeing, through partnership**

Who

16 adult learners

Tutors, staff and volunteers

What we did

Museum visits

Creative workshops

Literacy Awareness Training

How we worked

Warm, low-pressure space

Conversation and creativity

What changed

Learners felt confident and heard

Staff tried new approaches

Museums seen as adult learning spaces

What we shared

Free online resources

Learning shared widely

Key message

Culture supports learning and wellbeing

Partnership makes it work

Learning Across MoLI, anchored by **the Lit Lab.**



The whole museum at MoLI, including its exhibitions and gardens, functions as a learning environment. MoLI's dedicated learning space is the LitLab, a community centre on the fourth floor where people come together to explore stories and take part in civic life in a playful, welcoming way.

The LitLab is where short and long-term relationships are built through creative projects, a learner-centred approach, and conversation. It offers a safe, supportive environment for exploration and experimentation, where mistakes are a valued part of learning.

Free from the constraints of a traditional classroom, the LitLab creates space for imagination and storytelling.

Taking the playfulness of language by easing the pressure of spelling and grammar, it helps people feel at ease and supports creativity to flow more freely, inspired by the exhibitions, the gardens, and each other's stories.



Who is MoLI?

MoLI (Museum of Literature Ireland) is a not-for-profit, award-winning* museum in Dublin that celebrates Ireland's literary heritage, from great writers such as James Joyce and Oscar Wilde to contemporary writers, including Marian Keyes and Maeve Binchy. Housed in historic Newman House, it offers exhibitions, a library, gardens, a café, and interactive experiences.

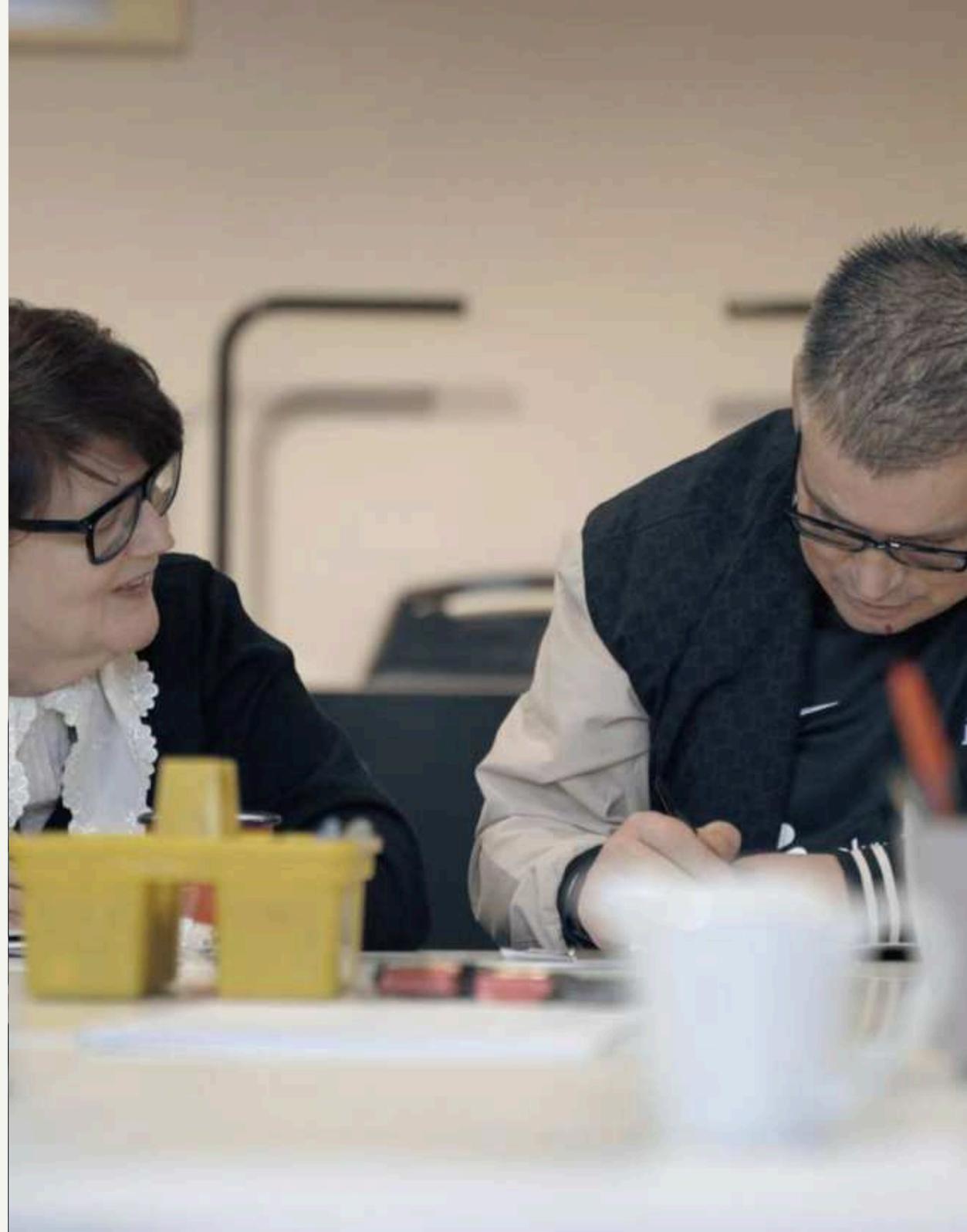
MoLI's vision is to inspire visitors through Irish writing and spark their own creativity. We bring our mission to life through exhibitions, workshops, and onsite and online programmes.

This project is one of our programmes with CDETB South Inner City Adult Education Service, supported by ALL Funding.

Who is **City of Dublin ETB?**

The South Inner City Adult Education Service is part of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb), which provides adult education and lifelong learning opportunities in Dublin's South Inner City.

It offers a range of programmes, including literacy support, community education, vocational training, and personal development courses. The service focuses on supporting adults with unmet educational needs, promoting inclusion, and helping learners gain skills for work, further education, and personal growth.



Literature for everyone?

How can MoLI, a literature museum, evolve beyond being a museum that honours great writers of the past and be a living laboratory, a place where everyone feels welcome to read, learn, and create their own stories?

This programme examines how adults with unmet literacy needs interact with a literary museum. Facilitated by artist Fiona Bolger, Adult Literacy Coordinator Martha Young, and Learning Manager Lily Cahill, the project entered its second phase in winter 2024. This stage involved creative writing workshops, alongside an active evaluation of the museum and gardens, guided directly by learner feedback.

The project aimed to identify best practices and effective methods for engaging adults with literacy needs, while also exploring how museums can serve as dynamic, inclusive, and learner-centred spaces for education and inspiration.



Values and Approach

At its heart, this project was about more than literacy skills — it was about already having a voice and trusting that you will be heard in a cultural space. The museum was approached as a shared civic space, where learning happens through conversation, creativity and participation.

“I thought it was really good. I thought it was really good ‘cause I haven’t been challenged like that for... quite some time. And it was a... It was a good challenge and a healthy challenge.”

- Learner Feedback

”

Adult Learner Feedback

1. Guided support and friendly staff make a big difference

Tours and audio guides are the easiest way to enjoy the museum

Friendly and welcoming staff turn the experience from stressful into engaging.

2. Accessibility matters

Text on displays is often too small. Larger print would help everyone.

Plain English and shorter sentences make exhibitions easier to understand.

Clear, bright lighting is needed to avoid disruption.

3. Wayfinding and navigation

A colour-coded or numbered floor map would help.

Exhibits should include clear instructions (e.g., “Walk under the sound shower” or “Pick me up” for headphones)

Start with the basics: what a museum is, why it exists, and what to expect.¹⁰





Adult Learner Feedback cont'd

4. Opportunities to learn and create

Writing activities were highly valued

Learners enjoyed reading each other's work.

The project opened up new educational opportunities.

5. Social and personal impact

Workshops created an opportunity to meet new people and build confidence.

The experience encouraged learners to try other cultural spaces.

6. Lifelong learning value

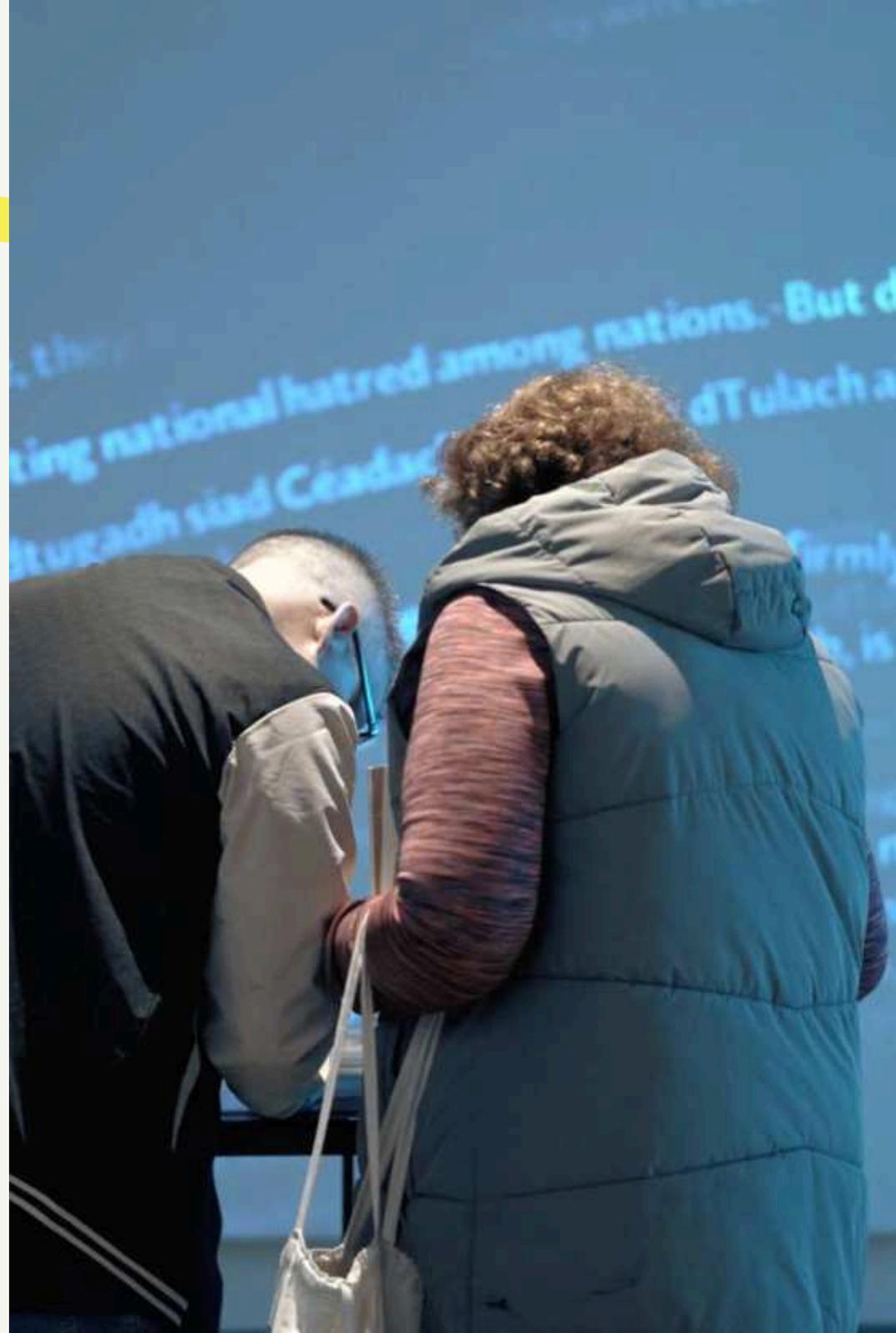
Museums can support ongoing education, reflection, and growth.

Literacy Awareness in Action

A literature museum can be for everyone when it listens, adapts, and actively invites participation from all communities and learners, and when it takes feedback seriously and applies it wherever possible.

One key outcome of this project was that learners shared their feedback directly with MoLI staff and volunteers.

In January 2025, the South Inner City Adult Education team delivered Literacy Awareness Training, helping to ensure inclusion is embedded in daily practice, not treated as a one-off project.





“The writing is tiny... You need some great glasses to look at it.”

- Learner Feedback on some parts of the Exhibitions

Embedding Literacy Inclusion Across MoLI



- **Clear language:** Design exhibitions, signage, and activities using plain, accessible wording.
- **Tailored delivery:** Offer workshops and tours that support diverse learning needs.
- **Welcoming experience:** Create an environment where visitors feel confident exploring literature on their own terms.
- **Organisation-wide practice:** Embed literacy awareness and training at every level of the organisation.

“Don’t assume people have
been to a museum before
and understand what to
do.”

- Learner Feedback

Project Outcomes - What changed because of this project, for the Learners?



This project placed learners at the centre. What follows is what learners themselves told us about their experience of learning in the museum.

Feeling welcome and safe

Learners spoke clearly about feeling comfortable in the museum. Many for the first time. Being welcomed, supported and treated with respect made it easier to take part and stay engaged.

“I always look forward to coming here. The staff are very welcoming — it’s a lovely environment to be in.”

Confidence through challenge

Learning involved real challenge, particularly around language and writing. Learners valued being stretched — because the challenge was honest, supportive and never shaming.

“I haven’t been challenged like that for quite some time — but it was a good challenge, a healthy challenge.”



Learning together

Learning was experienced as social and shared. Conversation, listening and peer exchange helped learners learn from one another and recognise the value of their own ideas.

“It’s a shared experience — talking together, bouncing ideas off each other, and knowing others picked up something from you as well.”

Motivation to continue

Positive experiences in the museum, with the place, staff and volunteers and each other, increased learners’ confidence and motivation — not just to return, but to continue learning and engaging with cultural spaces more broadly.

“I’d definitely recommend this to anyone. It makes you want to come back.”



What this tells us

Learner voices show that museums can be safe, welcoming and effective learning spaces for adults with unmet literacy needs, when learning is participatory, social and grounded in respect.

Project Outcomes - What changed because of this project, for the Museum?

Museum staff and tour guides increased awareness of unmet literacy needs and their impact on visitor experience.

Staff gained practical insight into how language, design and delivery shape accessibility.

The museum tested more conversation-based and participatory approaches to engagement.

Through practice and training, the museum showed openness to new questions, new ways of working, and learning through experience.

The museum strengthened its role as a civic, community-focused learning space.

What this tells us

With the right training and space to practice, museum staff became more confident in adapting how they engage visitors. Greater awareness led to simpler language, more listening and shared conversation. This helped the museum become more open, inclusive and responsive as a learning space

“The training gave me practical things I could use straight away... simpler language, more conversation, more checking in. It’s small changes, but they make a big difference.”

- MoLI Staff



Staff and Volunteer Literacy Awareness Training, Jan 2025 at MoLI

Project Outcomes - What changed because of this project, for Adult Education

Tutors saw how museums can support literacy, ESOL and digital learning in non traditional settings.

Tutors saw how museums can support literacy, ESOL and digital learning.

Taking part in cultural activities helped learners feel more confident and involved.

Learning was stronger when learners could take part and share ideas.

Museums were seen as part of adult education, not separate.

Practice improved for learners through CDET x MoLI working together on this project.



What this tells us

This shows that museums can support literacy, ESOL and digital learning as part of adult education. Taking part in cultural activities helped learners feel more confident and involved. Learning was stronger when learners could take part and share ideas. Working together helped museums and adult education see learning as a shared practice, not separate work.

My darling Kitser

Collective Original Poem by CDETБ x MoLI Group

Facilitated by poet, Fíona Bolger

with the support of Lily Cahil, MoLI, Martha Young, CDETБ, Diana Considine, CDTEB

I

My darling Kitser, how's it going?

I was out for a walk today.

My garden, caring, watering,
feeding and weeding.

My heart is like a tree growing every day
strong and big and the leaves are falling and
spreading love.

My heart is like darkness, with all the
sorrows in the world but my wife is my life.
Still I am standing. If I stay here
I wonder if I stand still will I ever change?
Hello old friend, time is
passing.

It could be worse, it really could.
You'll be an Angel's Lamp in front of me.
We live mostly in a construct.
We don't dream bigger than we should.
Does a tree know it's being
hugged.

II

Eternally pulsing, connecting, nurturing and protecting
the SPARK OF LIFE!

Autumn is so beautiful a time to refresh and renew.

Tara under green.

We live in a digital age where so many people
are left behind.

My heart is like a bicycle tyre.
The lowest of lows let us experience
the highest of highs.

Today my heart is sad, as this is the last
time we will meet up.
My heart aches for the people who have
passed before us.

The lesser gods know their own importance! Are you
sovereign and indefeasible?

I am thankful for the whole experience
I've had here over the last few weeks.

Sweetheart I have a little tale, it's tope secret
but I can tell you.



Fail better!

Learner Feedback Into Lasting Change

This project has shown that museums can be welcoming spaces for adults, including adults with unmet literacy needs. By listening closely to learners and acting on what they shared, MoLI changed how exhibitions, signage, tours, workshops and interactive experiences work. The result is a museum that is easier to navigate, more accessible, and easier to enjoy — for everyone.

The partnership between City of Dublin ETB South Inner City and MoLI strengthened literacy awareness across the organisation. It also showed what learner-centred museum work looks like in practice. This approach is grounded in listening, trying things out, and adapting over time. In the spirit of the art form, mistakes were treated not as failures but as chances to learn — as portals to discovery.

To keep this work going, time, care and investment are needed. Learner-centred approaches cannot be delivered through once-off projects. They need planning, reflection, evaluation and ongoing staff support. With this in place, museums can act as living public spaces, where learning flows both ways and where wellbeing, creativity and belonging can grow together.

Looking ahead, MoLI and City of Dublin ETB are committed to building on what we have learned. We will continue to improve spaces and programmes, and we will share learning openly so others can take similar steps.

We invite cultural and arts organisations to approach this work with care and the courage to experiment. By widening access and welcoming different people in, we can create deeper insight and learning for everyone and be prepared to fail better, as Samuel Beckett encourages.

**“Yes, I would 100%
recommend a friend... the
staff and the people around
are most helpful.”**

- Learner feedback

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