



H E N N E W S L E T T E R

nature weaving

Mingle often with good people to
keep your soul nourished.
Anthony Douglas Williams

OCTOBER 2019



Editor's Note

This issue has been my first as Editor so welcome everybody to this Autumn edition of the Newsletter!

First of all, I have to apologise for the delay. It has been a while since I had to put my Editor hat on, so it took me some time to get all my brain's gears going; have some trust, future issues will be easier!

After all, my journey as a healer had taken me in another direction, but life has a way of giving chances to use all you have learnt so bear with me a little while longer.

You will see that there have been a few changes to the structure and the design. I hope you will like them. I welcome input and feedback; if among us there is a print designer that would be willing to give up some time for the newsletter, I would love to hear from them.

Enjoy your reading!

Marta

ChickLit's Editor's Note

Hello everybody!

My name is Theo and I have taken over as editor for the ChickLit magazine from Liadhain Quaid, who did a good job as editor this past year.

If you would like to see your children's art, stories, reviews or photos in the Chicklit magazine, please send to my email address:

monaghan.theo@gmail.com.

All submissions are welcome!

Thanks,

Theo Monaghan





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Chairperson's Letter

Hello and welcome,

Your new NCB are off to a flying start this autumn. We're welcoming many new members from all parts of Ireland and from abroad. Even Marta, our new newsletter officer, has just joined us from Italy. There are now many more people who don't have the option to choose to home educate in their own countries who come here to build the lives they want for their families. To do the welcoming we're asking for more volunteers to act as contact people for their area and now for their language too. Contact Margaret to offer your help.

Michael, our new website officer has succeeded in getting PayPal to include us in their annual Hackathon, where they assist charities and non-profit organisations to build better websites. They will have an entire team of engineers working for us for many hours. So we're hoping to extend the great work on our existing site by adding new sections with more information on Unschooling, on Autistic Spectrum and Neurodiversity in general, QQI and Third Level education, on starting and running meet-ups, and on Tusla Assessment. The major points from some of the discussions on Facebook will be brought to the website too. We also intend to add

an improved payments and membership management module.

Anna, our email officer, is also highly skilled with other social media, and we're looking at extending her role to include these areas where she's already very active. Although we do already have links on our website to many facebook groups, we're keen to make the central role of HEN, networking, more effective by developing this further.

Our secretary, Brendan, has negotiated an improved insurance policy for meet-ups. More activities are now included, check the policy for details and please do remember to keep an attendance record and send it to Brendan after your meetup.

We have now joined "The Wheel," a national organisation for charities and non-profit organisations. This has given us the opportunity to attend meetings and training that could be relevant to us. The next such meeting is with Pat Rabbitte, new chairman of Tusla. Annette, our Tusla liaison officer will remind him to keep Home Education high in his priorities.





I attended the “Future Island” conference in August. Home education was not on the agenda but I did raise some issues at question times and was then called on to answer questions by the chair. As a result we’ve had contact from the Science Gallery about including home educated children in

parents who have “graduated” maybe you might consider bringing some actual home ed experience to the task and apply for the assessor job in the next intake. The jobs are advertised on publicjobs.ie and we hope to mention it on our website too.

A new project you might like to take part in is some research into home education in Ireland. There’s a lot of information available from the USA and UK but very little on what’s actually happening in Ireland. We’d like to gather information on Irish home ed. especially what home educated children have gone on to do as adults.

Although we don’t yet have a new Gathering Officer for 2020 we’re proceeding with preparations. Drewstown House has been booked for August 20-23, and we’ve started a wish list! We hope some of the teenagers might do short workshops/ presentations on their favourite topics, just to inspire the younger ones. We’ve been asked for some practical craft workshops like woodwork and metalwork (but have to check with insurance and with Drewstown about whether we can do it)... anyway, this is the time to put forward your suggestions. Volunteers welcome!

There’s more to talk of, but my “almost 8” year old has awoken and needs hugs and breakfast, so till the next time... keep encouraging and supporting each other, your children’s lives will be better for your care.

Kevin O’Kelly
HEN Chairperson



opportunities previously reserved for Transition Year students.

If there are any such events or opportunities in your area that could raise the profile of home education, and encourage families who are considering it, please do let our PR officer, Cora, know.

Tusla have been very busy indeed with the increase in assessment applications. They have recruited new assessors and did invite me to provide a briefing on Home Ed and Unschooling with the new team. So far most of the assessors are former teachers, school principals and inspectors. Most seem to understand very well the limitations of the school system and are very positive about the possibilities of home ed instead. If there are any home ed

Photo by Lukas from Pexels





Gathering Pics



Gathering Pics

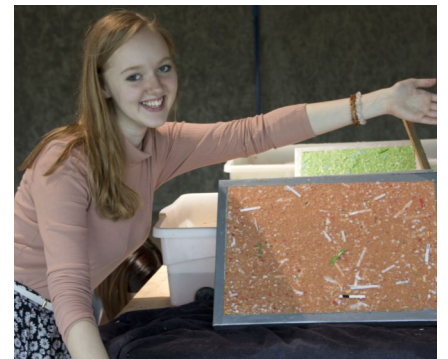


“Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, ‘
What! You too? I thought I was the only one.’”
C.S. Lewis

News from Local Meet Ups



I'm just sending you on a few pics from the bar monkey class on may 27th, it was great fun for the kids, using bars to hang from and build up strength and do tricks on, my nephew Steve is very passionate about teaching the class! Aine Parkes



Papermaking at the Visual in Carlow. On the 17th June a group of Home Educators enjoyed learning about making paper. We shredded paper, put it in bowls, blended it then caught it on screens and stuck it to boards. Thanks to Emily Rainsford who organised it. We enjoyed the exhibition tour too. Heather Rice



Craft time at Galway Westside Library. Thanks to Piroska Mihalik for the regular workshops!

On the 21st August a group of 12 plus year olds and adults went to Tallaght Library to hear Tomi Reichental, a Holocaust survivor tell about his life. In 1944 aged nine Tomi was sent to the Nazi concentration camp in Bergen-Belsen. He told us about his life leading up to this time, the political and social developments and then about his experiences there. He shared the story in a way that made it very human, yet was okay to listen to. So often the Holocaust gets turned into numbers so an individual's tale was very different and powerful. He only started to speak about it in recent years, because he feels people need to remember what happened and how it could happen again in our modern climate. He has a book about his life and has helped write a children's book also. We are very grateful to Natacha Weadick who set it up with the help of HEN and the Holocaust Education Trust Ireland.



The Rice family, Photo of Zen and Kalia Rice with Tomi.

Share with us what you have been up to lately! You don't fancy sharing pics of the children? That is fine, too; simply write a caption and send a pic of the place you have been at.



End of (home)school year for Smallz Homeschoolers (Galway) at Loughwell Farm June 2019
Photo by Roberta Rivera



Storytelling time at Charlie Byrne's Bookshop for Smallz Homeschoolers (Galway) - April 2019
Photo by Roberta Rivera



Craft time for Smallz Homeschoolers (Galway) - May 2019. Photo by Roberta Rivera



Fun at Salthill beach for Smallz Homeschoolers (Galway) - June 2019. Photo by Roberta Rivera

Share with us what you have been up to lately! You don't fancy sharing pics of the children? That is fine, too; simply write a caption and send a pic of the place you have been at.

News from the Camping Group



Pictures submitted by Irene Doran





Art

Art has always been important to me. Not necessarily in a practical way, but I could never imagine life without regular injections of beauty and creativity.

When my boy was small, we did the usual activities



– finger-painting, collaging, potato-stamping, and so on. In general though, our adventures in hands-on creativity have been dictated by the boy's interests.

We tend to go through fits and starts of intense creativity. He'll have an all-consuming passion for one thing or another. At the moment it's drawing, particularly characters from ancient comic books that he likes to find in second-hand bookshops.

Once, after taking part in a junk-puppetry workshop, he spent weeks creating an entire community of junk puppets complete with a home-town for them to live in. Way back when he discovered loom bands he spent hours on the loom each day, progressing quickly from weaving simple bracelets to creating big, complex dragons. My favourite was the little hand-sewn felt food characters – these were adorable and we had a large extended family of them.



There have been many phases. The intensity of his

focus on these activities fascinates me. Given the opportunity, children will delve deep and learn what they need to learn. When they've had their fill, they'll move on to the next thing.

In the background, we do have more consistent work going on. As well as our own art and art history study we generally have a weekly class of some



description, and regular visits to the National Gallery to see our favourite pieces or special exhibitions.

I use the word 'study' for want of a more relaxed term. Art has been one of the most enjoyable aspects of our home-school journey. I already had an interest in art and art history but certainly not an extensive knowledge. I studied it in secondary school and enjoyed it (though I regret that it was taught in such a linear, textbook manner – ironically, there seemed to be little room for creativity outside clearly defined boundaries).

At some point in the very early years of home-educating, I stumbled upon a series of children's books by Mike Venezia – biographies of artists and composers. This has probably been one of our all-time favourite collections. The books introduce artists and their work in a way that's engaging and



Art

fun. The artists themselves are humanised. Colourful and humorous illustrations sealed the deal for my boy. He's read and re-read those



books. There are any number of wonderful books out there about art and artists. Books for children and books for adults, although I suspect a book that's really worth its salt will engage both.

During our years in Australia we were fortunate to live a short drive from the Art Gallery of WA. We visited regularly and when in the city for any reason we never walked by without popping in, if just to breathe a few moments in the presence of one of our favourites. Dublin is not quite so accessible, but we do what we can.

The point is, art is part of life. It's all around us and it is



there for everyone, young and old, rich and poor. It's part of our culture. Art tells the story of who we are and the road we've travelled to get to today. It's part of history, literature, science, maths, politics.

Many years of reading about art, creating at home, visiting galleries everywhere we went, talking about art in our everyday lives, has meant that my boy has a natural interest in, and a good general knowledge of, the great artists and art movements. It's by no means all-inclusive. There's so much more to discover. There are endless tangents to follow and that's one of the things that makes it so exciting. The potential is there to discover things that speak to you, that make your heart swell, or give you a lump in your throat. And then too, things that disgust you, frighten you, cause you to question yourself.

*I could never imagine life
without regular injections of beauty
and creativity*

We need all of it. It is all part of the human experience. It's living in colour. Art can console us and provoke us. It can open our eyes and our minds and our hearts. And it's all around us, in our libraries, our galleries and museums, our churches, craft fairs and markets, the architecture of our towns and cities. We just need to look for it.

Catherine Monaghan

Originally published, pictures included, on Perfectly Good - Catherine Monaghan's blog on February 11th 2019. You can learn more about her and her blog here: <https://perfectlygood.blog/home/>



If you have a blog and you want to be featured in our newsletter, get in touch at newsletterhen@gmail.com



A journey into Home Education

Hi my name is Anne Marie Beggs, I live in Portmarnock Co Dublin with husband, three children who are 27, 25, and 16. We also have five dogs and 2 cats.

My eldest daughter Dannielle, who is now 27, started school in the Holy Faith in Clontarf and flourished from the start. We were excited and delighted when she started school and her experience lived up to our expectations. Her brother Christian, who is now 25, started a year later. We expected his experience to be identical. We could not have been more wrong! Obviously the Holy Faith was a girls only school so he had to attend a different school. At the time we were in the process of moving from Malahide to Portmarnock. We decided to enrol him in school in Malahide as he knew a couple of the children who were attending the Malahide school. He was very quiet but didn't cry and appeared happy enough as long as we walked him into his seat in the classroom he didn't like to be left in the line outside.

After a couple of weeks he was starting to learn words. He really started to struggle! He couldn't remember words or recognise words no matter how many times he learnt them. Watching him as a 4 year old so upset is one of my most difficult memories. I asked advice from a neighbour who was a teacher she thought that it was just a different teaching method from my daughters



Photo by mentatdgt from Pexels

school and that he would be ok. He was not ok so I asked advice from the teacher who had taught my daughter in junior infants. She said get his eyes tested, his ears tested and if they are fine then get him assessed. I did all three eyes and ears were fine and his assessment showed remarkably high results in the area of maths and below average in English. I paid for this privately. The psychologist said he was too young for a formal diagnosis. I did a lot of research and from my reading of many books I knew my son was Dyslexic. He did terribly in junior infants and found the school to be incapable of helping.

Watching him as a 4 year old so upset is one of my most difficult memories.

So I decided I wasn't interested in another national school so I moved him to a private school Sutton Park. It was the best decision of my life. He was still struggling with English but they were allowed to run, climb trees, they had three breaks rather than two. His report at the end of senior infants was excellent but was still way behind in English. The teacher did suggest keeping him back but I knew that was not the solution.

Fast forward to age 8 when I had him reassessed. For some ridiculous reason this is the age they can give a formal diagnosis. He was of course Dyslexic and was many years behind despite tutoring in school and at home. Learning support in school wasn't working. I had read the book *The Gift of Dyslexia* and knew that everything made sense in this book. I bought the book and the materials to help my son and set about following along the books recommendations. I could see the benefit but knew I needed help. I found a wonderful lady who had trained in the UK using these methods. He attended her once a week after school missing his Holy Communion classes which the principal wasn't that happy about but she appreciated that this was



looked like it was going to happen but some parents pulled their kids at the last minute.

My daughter moved on to a primary school in Malahide. She found it daunting having to stand in line and no parents being allowed in the building. She was very bored and found some of the behaviour difficult; she had a substitute teacher for part of the year who was excellent and came up with strategies to help, but the second term of



Photo by Louis Bauer from Pexels

more important. I saw an instant change in his demeanour he became happy confident child.

He knew he was intelligent. I decided I would go to the UK to train as a Dyslexic specialist. I spent two years travelling back and forwards to the UK to complete my training. It changed my life completely at the time I had just taken redundancy from my well paid job as a financial controller for a large entertainment group. I did this to spend more time helping my son I always thought he wouldn't have struggled so much if I hadn't worked.

My youngest daughter was approaching her third birthday as I finished my training. I knew I didn't want to go the same education route as I had with my elder daughter and son in case she also was Dyslexic I knew that the system currently used in schools doesn't serve the Dyslexic child well. I had heard about a Montessori Primary School and met some of the kids from it, they were happy well adjusted children.

I enrolled her on her third birthday in Drumnigh Montessori School on that day she met three other little girls who would be her best friends for years All of their birthdays were on the same week in April. My daughter flourished in this school the method suited her so well. She could wear what she liked to wear she could work for hours on what interested her. There were two classes in the school at the time 3-5 year olds and 6-9 year olds. We as parents were trying to set up a 10-12 class which

fourth class was very unhappy time for her. She begged me to home school her. Even though I had helped my son and many children at this stage she was such a friendly sociable child I thought she would be missing out!

At the same time my son was sitting the Junior Cert which he did ok in, not as well as he should, but I wasn't that worried about Junior Cert. Then came the Leaving Cert and that was a very different story. He was sick all the time, I spent half my life dropping him to school only to return a couple of hours later to collect.

He would either have migraines or stomach pains. In sixth year I offered to home school

I tutored him in all his subjects at home. It was very unconventional! He would dig the garden and I would read the history books - he loved history. For geography we would play ball games and I would give him information and he would answer questions after.



he said "No mam, I would just do nothing".

So for sixth year I paid a lot of money for him to attend at most 2 days a week. I tutored him in all his subjects at home. It was very unconventional! He would dig the garden and I would read the history books - he loved history.

For geography we would play ball games and I would give him information and he would answer questions after. We did

lots of exam papers to practice

questions. My father did Physics with him once a week him. He did fantastically well in

the Leaving Cert: he failed everything in the mocks but got As and Bs a few months later. This didn't require hours of studying, he didn't do hours ever!

My youngest completed junior school and made lots of friends. Did she ever enjoy the experience? Not particularly. Then came secondary school she couldn't get into the school her friends were attending because numbers looking for places were too high. I had no option or so I thought but only to send her to an all girls school. I knew in my heart that this was not going to be a good fit. She liked the rough and tumble of life with boys and their approach to friendship. She found the school hard; despite being extremely friendly and sociable, she was excluded, bullied, and in general found it difficult. So after a lot of soul searching, I decided to home school her.

To start with we were very methodical and followed and online American syllabus. She was fantastic at it and she read a lot of books. We had our Tulsa visit they were delighted with her . Gradually my daughter got bored with that system and wanted to do the Junior Cert but do it in second year. I'm afraid I was a bit disorganised so missed the deadline to apply for the exams. We began to look at other options and my daughter decided she

I think the best advice would be to enjoy your children, talk to your children and above all listen to your children.



wanted to do some IGCSEs . She wanted to do four subjects, Maths, English, Science and History. She was already very good at history Maths and English and I am very interested in Science. She didn't kill herself and the exams were approaching and she was only 13 at the time so I was trying to persuade her to do them the following year but she was insistent. We decided to just do the English and Maths which she did age 13 and did very well.

She had no interest in doing more IGCSE's and at 14 wanted to move onto A levels. We enrolled in some part time courses for English Maths History Biology. It soon became apparent that it wasn't a good fit. She could cope with the work but some of the reading material on A level English is not that suited to a 14 year old.

She is and elite gymnast so trains for 25 hours a week but that was in the evenings otherwise she wasn't meeting anyone her own age. At the time I hadn't found HEN which is a pity. She loved dancing and had taken ballet from the age of 3 to 11 but had to drop it when gymnastics became more intensive. I found Phoenix Performing Arts College which my daughter could get to on the train herself I though some morning dance classes would be great for her. She could meet people her own age and also dance. She went for an audition and the principal asked her if she would like to come to the school full time. It was a Friday and she said you can start on Monday. While we were there, she said yes, she'd love to.

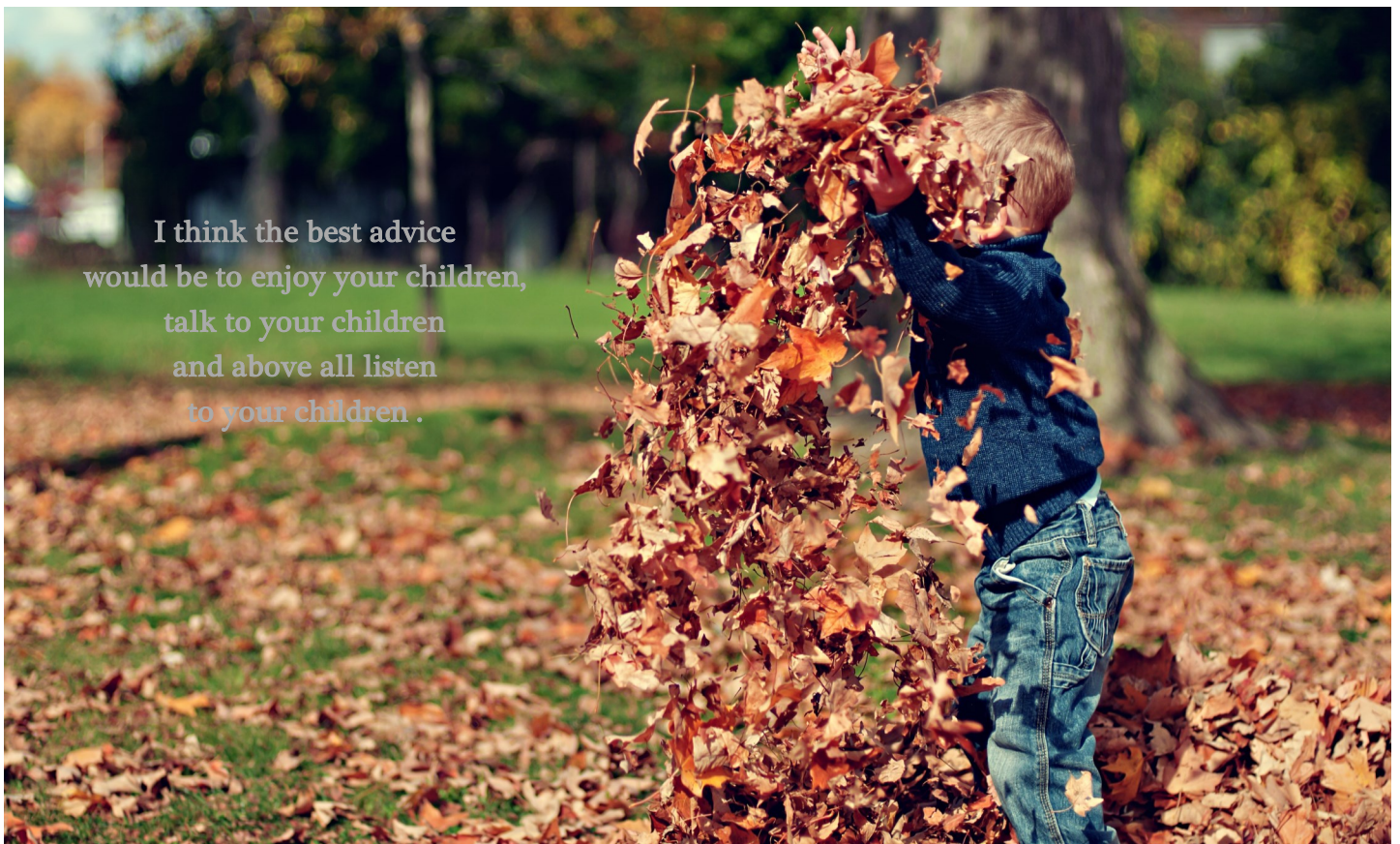


She confessed to being very nervous but agreed to go for a couple of weeks to try it out. She didn't want it to interfere with her gymnastic training so she got permission to leave early every day. As a result we would have to do the academic subjects at the weekends or evenings; so she is partially home schooled. Really she has the best of both worlds. She just took it a week at a time and she just continued to go, but knew that she didn't have to stay if it didn't suit. This year she will be doing her A levels and will have to do a lot of work to achieve her dream which is to go to the UK to dance college.

There are many challenges to homeschooling and it's not the education part. There are times that you would just like some time to yourself. At times it feels a little restrictive but I think that was my own making. My daughter loved being homeschooled and we are fantastic friends. We had mixed reactions from people when we told them she was homeschooled. Some people thought it was fantastic others particularly some family members thought she was missing out. My daughter doesn't think she was. She is still ahead of her peers in English her vocabulary is much more advanced. This is not because I did anything special . Most of the time we did no academic work, we just chatted. I continue to work in my role as a Dyslexic specialist I think this helped me understand my children, and help them in education, it also showed me the value of listening to children.

I've worked with hundreds over children over the past 14 years they are all unique humans beings who all need a different solution. I think the best advice would be to enjoy your children, talk to your children and above all listen to your children . The last piece of advice is to be flexible; plans change from day and day and it doesn't matter. What you want is happy healthy children

Anne Marie Beggs





Reviews



Jonathan Park Audio Adventures

Our family was introduced to these stories a few years ago and we all still enjoy listening to them! It follows the Park and Brennan families in their adventures as Christian homeschooling, Creation Museum running families.

The stories are packed with many exciting adventures based on accurate historical, geological, archeological and scientific information. They bring out new volumes every 6 months or so which means they include the latest discoveries in all the fields mentioned above.

This website has a subscription called Unlimited that gives access to all their exciting adventure stories for about €9 per month which can be cancelled at any time.

Go to <https://www.jonathanpark.com/> and check it out!

Diane Lewis



Explorium. National Sport and Science Centre, Blackglan Rd, Sandyford, Dublin, D18 N1F2

<https://www.explorium.ie/>

We visited in July and there was an offer on so for myself and three children it cost €34 entry to both the Science and Junior sections.

My 8 year old says it is even better than W5 and I agree with him, and W5 is VERY popular with us!

The Science area has loads of interactive displays, there is something there for everyone for all ages and interests. My three and five year old had just as much fun there as their older brother. There is tons of learning done without anyone realising it.

I liked that most of the displays are on one floor so it's easier to keep track of kids. We went on a busy day and yet there was little or no waiting for turns and it didn't feel overcrowded.

There was no time limit on our stay at all, only for designated workshops for which you also need to book in advance and pick a time slot which we didn't bother with. There was plenty there to keep us busy.

The Junior area kept all the kids happy for a few more hours, we spent five hours in total in Explorium and we could have stayed longer. Nobody was bored yet! I liked the many building and tinkering as well as art options in the Junior area. It is a separate area from the Science so I did Science first, then we all went to Junior. If kids wanted to go separate ways then you would need two adults to enable supervision. Having said that the Junior area does cater for up to about age 10.

The staff are all very helpful and friendly. The cafe has good healthy food on offer at reasonable prices. Carparking is free. It is easy to get to with your own transport as it's not in or near city centre but on the outskirts.

The science area would cater for all ages, there was plenty for me to learn there too!

I understand it is pricey at normal prices but they seem to have regular offers and off peak times so it's worth keeping an eye out for those. I found the website a bit confusing to navigate so if in doubt I would call them to clarify times and costs.

We definitely gave it a 5 star rating and if we lived near Dublin wouldn't hesitate to take out a year's membership, it's the perfect place for rainy days and meet ups.

Demelza Franssen



The Pooka Pages for Pagan Kids

We found this online magazine by chance and we fell in love with it! It is published shortly before each quarter and free to download. It contains original stories by Lora Craig-Gaddis, artwork, coloring pages, herbal lore, crafts, and recipes. The stories are fun to read; and the colouring pages are original works of art, interesting enough for older kids - and adults too - to colour. Our favourite part is certainly the crafts and the recipes; they are great (and yummy!) to do at home with the kids, both younger and older ones and help us to celebrate the seasons and stay in touch with Nature - something that features heavily in our home education. The magazine has an overall light feeling and it is not attached to a specific pagan path; it speaks mostly of fairies and Nature, so it can be easily adapted to your specific beliefs. We find it a great way to share the Old Ways with the younger generations, so if you are pagan or simply interested in the Old Ways and fairy tales do check it out... worst case scenario, you can simply use it as inspiration for seasonal crafts and recipes!



TINYBOP APPS (for Androids)

We love Tiny Bop Apps! Our favourite one is The Human Body, which allows to explore the skeletal, muscular, nervous, circulatory, respiratory, and digestive systems. The heart beats, guts gurgle, lungs breathe, and eyes see - it is all interactive and really quite entertaining and a great way to learn about the human body. But you can also find Homes, in which you get to see different houses in different parts of the world (America, Guatemala, Yemen...) and can see how people live in different countries, climates and culture; the Earth lets you to explore from crust to core and see how volcanos and earthquakes function; Weather shows you the effect of weather including hurricanes and tornadoes and lets you play around with air, wind, sun, temperature and precipitation (this has been a great conversation starter on climate change); Skyscrapers which lets you see how skyscrapers function, including plumbing. Last, Simple Machines, which we have found the least interesting, but still worth a look. Each app comes also with a handbook that you can download for free from the website.

You can try them all for free for a week and then you get to pay a yearly pass for all of them.

We are giving 4 stars, simply because not all of their apps can run on Android (they keep adding them, but it is still a shame having to wait), otherwise we would have given 5.

Have you found a resource you loved? Or a book you totally thought was great and it turned out to be a big mistake? Share your opinion with other home edders and help them along in their journey. Come on, you know how hard it is to choose an app, a new audio book or a curriculum! Send us an email!





Don't engage in self-injurious behaviour while baking with children! Make Apple Puffs!

The chances that you may resort to poking your eyeballs out with a spatula while baking with your little darling children is wholly determined by a rather complex equation. But, rather than delve into the joys of complex values and equalities (or some such mathematical jargon), put simply:

Increased number of children + decreased age of children
= length of time baking (preparing of ingredients to bake)

In my case, having input all variables,

[3 children + ages (1+4+7)]

I had the understandable answer that the time actually doing anything remotely like baking should take the sum total of 3.67529 seconds.

Being the patient martyr that I am, who loves nothing better than creating alongside my children (snort) (hold on, like me wipe the tears of mirth away before I continue...) (cough. Yes, okay. Where



was I? Oh, yes)

Emily! PUT DOWN THE SPATULA

I spent all of approximately 4 minutes preparing this with three enthusiastic helpers (disclosure: the eldest decided to wander off eating the apple

cores, so really, my equation should really be more like: [3 children (1 x 50% of time spent) + (2 x 100% of time spent) + ages (1 + 4 + 7)] But I digress...). This is a super quick and very tasty recipe for Apple Puffs.

Note: We used eating apples which, due to some bruising, were deemed Unfit To Eat by Grace, who sorted out the fruit bowl today. If you used cooking apples which are considerably more tart, you would need more sugar.

Ingredients:

- 1 roll of ready made Roll-Out Puff Pastry
- 3-4 apples
- sugar to sweeten and taste (entirely dependent on your apples. I used 3 teaspoons)

How-To:

- Peel apples and grate them quickly.
- Unroll sheet of pastry, spoon on the grated apple, sprinkle with a little sugar.
- Roll up and cut into approximately 1/2 inch slices.
- Lay flat on a tray lined with baking paper and bake for approximately 20-25 minutes at 180°C until golden, puffy and crispy.

Sprinkle with icing sugar, and enjoy with some cream or ice-cream and those delightful mini-bakers of yours!



Emily Rainsford Ryan

Originally published on Online Journal of Emily Rainsford on January 29th 2016. You can learn more about her and her blog here: <http://blog.thenest.ie/>

If you have a recipe you want to share, get in touch at newsletterhen@gmail.com



Homeschooler to College: Mary-Aoife Ong

In this section you will find interviews to grown ups that have been home educated. They share how home education has prepared them for adulthood and their life; their like and dislike. They share their wisdom and their stories help to put our occasional fears at rest.

Name and Age

Mary-Aoife Ong aged 19

Your home education journey

I was homeschooled since 2010 along with my younger brother. We went to school before that so we have had the experience in both types of learning fields.

When we first began to homeschool, we took the approach of sitting at the kitchen table and trying to do school books together. We soon learnt this didn't suit our family - my brother Séamus would end up kicking a football against the wall while I'd be off dancing around the kitchen! We decided to throw all schoolbooks under the stairs and take a more natural approach instead. A typical day could start off early from about 7.30am onwards (we were early risers in our house!) with my brother going across the road to chat to his friends at the school bus stop and wave goodbye (he probably drove them all mad!). Then we did all sorts of things from art, drama, music, sports, cooking and going on plenty of day trips as well as school subjects like Maths, English, Irish, etc. The one rule was no television during the day and use of computers/phones only for educational purposes and that worked very well as it meant we had to find other ways to entertain ourselves and we became more motivated as a result. As we got older we probably spent more time doing school

I could go at my own pace.

I could also be myself and let my personality grow

work by choice but definitely at our own pace. As a family our outlook was that Seamus and I were in the driving seat and Mammy and Daddy were there to help steer the way if we needed any help.

What has been your favorite thing about homeschooling?

Definitely the freedom and opportunities! The ability to pick and choose my life path was fantastic as well as taking unique opportunities that I probably wouldn't have gotten if I was in school. Also the lack



of pressure, both study and peer. I didn't have to be at a certain stage at any time with school work; I could go at my own pace. I could also be myself and let my personality grow – I think if I was in school I would have lost this, gone with the flow and probably would have become a bit of a Kardashian!

What was difficult about being homeschooled?

Being lonely sometimes and always feeling the need to prove myself to others that I was good enough. Outside people just love to talk about school and I found it exhausting and discouraging constantly having to explain why I didn't go wherever I went. I remember I got so fed up one day when I was younger and a man asked why I wasn't in school when I was at the shops. I responded by



telling him “the government told me I don’t have to go!!” The questions just got too much sometimes.

A favorite homeschooling memory

I definitely have really fond memories of my first HEN conferences in Mount Melleray and Petersburg, particularly with all the older teens around the place.

I remember mam talking to them and shyly joining into their conversation and just thinking wow, they are so cool! Hahaha!!! They definitely inspired me. Another great memory was recently receiving results from a QQI course in Tourism and Travel I did. I was over the moon with my results and I got my first choice offer to study event management in DIT in round 0 before the leaving cert results even came out! I just felt everything I worked for from not doing state exams to sticking with the home education when the going was tough was totally worth it.

The worst homeschooling memory

Loneliness was probably one of the few bad memories I have. For those of you who know me, I love being with people and organising things and you will probably remember all the different things myself and my brother tried to set up from pen-pal clubs, teen meet ups, trips abroad and a GAA/Hurling club (Seamus did that one of course) Naturally, not everyone was into these things and with HEN being a small organization I did find it hard and lonely sometimes to find other homeschoolers with similar interests who loved structure and wanted to do and organize stuff nonstop. Despite living in a housing estate in Dublin, sometimes the 4 walls of the house could get on top of you and you could feel a little isolated and alone.

Do you think you will homeschool your own children if you have any?

Yes I’d be happy to homeschool my children if they’d like the idea. I’ll have to try and find a husband who agrees with homeschooling first

though!! Hahaha!

Any regrets directly related to being homeschooled?

I have no regrets regarding homeschooling. Maybe not doing enough if anything! I’m only beginning to see how much free time I had now so I’d really encourage homeschoolers out there to take full advantage of the opportunity of being home educated. There are no limits and the world really is your oyster.

What you feel is the worst misnomer about homeschoolers? Or the worst prejudice you have had to face?

I think the biggest misconception is homeschoolers are not social. I firmly believe homeschoolers have a huge advantage when it comes to social situations. They are able to grow, hold onto their beliefs and values and let their individual personalities flourish instead of having their confidence knocked as it is often the case in school. Homeschoolers also get to mix with people of all different ages at meetups and are often much more confident talking to adults than school goers as a result. In school classrooms can be so packed and there’s no way a teacher can give their individual attention to each child so students have to fight to be seen and heard. By being home educated, the child can have the chance to be heard in a smaller and more natural environment. They don’t feel the need to impress their classmates and can grow into the people they are meant to be.

How do you think being homeschooled prepared you for DIT college and what you will do in your future?

I feel homeschooling has 100% prepared me for going to college this year. I’ve gained so many skills with the homeschooling, made mistakes and learnt from them, had fantastic opportunities and I feel am constantly growing as a person!

Mary-Aoife Ong

Homeschooling in Spain

In Spain homeschooling is not yet officially regulated and there is no specific requirements as towards the parents/tutors training or educational background. Neither a special qualification nor any economic standard is necessary to opt for the possibility to educate at home.

On one hand, Spanish law establishes that schooling is mandatory in a state approved center from age six to sixteen, on the other hand, the

an individualized educational program, without considering the failure to enroll them in a state-recognized institute, as a sign of disprotection. Overall, the main problem is that in some of the provinces there is no specific protocol, so the situation can be a bit confused.

Despite this current legal insecurity there are many families that object to obey a law with a lack of

In Spain homeschooling is not yet officially regulated

specifications that seems unfair and, in general, it is tolerated to do so, although it is true that some families have had problems on the moment they have taken their children out of the recognized educational system, or in cases when, never being enrolled in any institute, have experienced some other matter in which Social Services intervene and/ or they are simply detected by the administration.

Up to now, the families intervened by the Administration represent a minority within the collective; yet there is no guarantee that a family will not be cited by Social Services and that a legal process will not be initiated. Caused by the lack of a “universal” country-wide protocol on how to act, and in the absence of a clear procedure established, each province and even each public official might act differently.

In the absence of specific protocols for home-schooling, cases are often treated applying protocols designed to deal with absentism, ignoring the fact that an alternative schooling is being provided. This is the main reason why it is advisable to have an individualized educational project prepared for each child and keep a written record of the activities that are being carried out, describing the acquisition of skills and knowledge, whether that be at home or in a private center, cultural, sports, activities, socialization, as well as trips or any other subject or activity, included in the educational project.

Overall, When a family chooses to home educate in



Spanish Constitution recognizes the freedom of education (article 27.1) and guarantees the right of fathers and mothers to provide an education in accordance with their own convictions (art. 27.3).

Being as such, we interpret that home-schooling would fit into that educational freedom; however, it should be mentioned that the decision of the Constitutional Court of December 2, 2010, makes this freedom subject to a future specification of the law on education in which home-schooling supposedly shall be recognized and/or regulated. There are provinces where steps are being taken towards greater recognition by local administrations; this is the case of the Basque Country and Cantabria, where the BALORA decree has been approved as an instrument to be used by Social Services to assess the well being of minors residing in these communities, and it officially contemplates families to provide their children with



Spain, the best option is to contact families in their area who have already gone through this process and have updated information on what has taken place on this regard in that specific province; which is why A.L.E. - Asociación por la libre Educación - is really vital.

A.L.E. members come from all kinds of origins, educational levels, wealthy or poor, religious or atheist...; there are families who, based on a conscious and respectful approach to the development of their new-born decide never to go to school from the beginning, even avoiding the nurseries. There are families that stick to the common subjects that would be dealt with at "school"...although they usually take the freedom to establish time-frames and schedules adjusted to the needs and possibilities of each child, offering them an individualized and flexible education at their own pace. Among our members there are families that do not formally separate the learning-process from life's experiences.

It is understood that the acquisition of knowledge occurs continuously, not only at home, but in the world, and that people have a natural curiosity and faculties that lead them spontaneously towards that process. The child becomes the true protagonist of



Photo by James Wheeler from Pexels

its own development, following a path of self-learning, in which the adult does not direct, only accompanies and guides. Other families travel and make the world their school, some join in mutual projects,

there are those who take the best of all options and create their own, and we will even find people exploring ways that do not generally fit in any of the previous considered options, knowing that the path to learn and teach, to live and grow in freedom, is one that each family or individual needs to explore individually!

Re. higher education, in Spain it is possible to sign up for 3rd or 4th of ESO in an approved center, and thus obtain an official degree; bearing in mind, though, that each autonomous province establishes a different procedure for students who enroll into the educational at an older age.

Another option is to pass a high school exam independently. This can be done when you turn 18 y.o. or accessing the secondary education centers for adults (ESPA), which can also be accessed from age 16, if in possession of a work - contract on the moment of inscription. Once again it is convenient to review the requirements of each province; however, it is allowed to be examined in another province than the one of residence.

Another way to enter the regulated educational system at an "older" age is through the exams for direct admission to the schools for professional "trades" training, From age 17 to the professional training cycles of medium level and for superior levels at age 19. Usually the exams consist in English, Castellano, History and a fourth subject directly related to the trade you have chosen. It is also possible to access to university through a direct exam, available from age 25.

Even in this confusing situation, we know that home education allows us to offer each child what we consider to be of need in each moment and we are doing our best to support home educators, including if necessary through legal advice from our lawyer, a specialist in home education.

Ale Asociación por la libre Educación
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(Article based on the FAQ kindly sent by the A.L.E.)



A Chat with... Angelica Grant

My name is Angelica Grant. I have two girls, Izzy is 15 and Tilly is 13. Izzy attended Junior and senior infants but Tilly had always been homeschooled.

We were always aware that home education was a possibility thanks to a couple of homeschooling families that we had met through a breastfeeding support group. However, Izzy really wanted to try school as she had loved her playschool, which was a small, free-play and community based playschool. School was a very different experience though and although she settled quite well, we kept the option of learning at home open for her and she decided after finishing senior infants that she would like to learn at home instead. To be honest, homeschooling felt like a very natural progression from how we had been living and parenting, school was just a bit of a detour really!!!

At the start of this journey, we used school books and tried the "school at home" approach. That



lasted about a month. After that, we (as in myself and my husband) took a different approach and became facilitators and co-learners, rather than teachers. We realised quite quickly that the absorption of knowledge was greatly enhanced when it was sought out by the girls themselves, compared to when it was imposed by us. Overall, I'd say I am the primary facilitator for learning as my

husband works full-time. When he is here, he would be very involved, especially with anything to do with technology. I am very fortunate in that my parents live next door to us and they are more than happy to share their skills and wisdom with the girls.

We don't use a curriculum, but the girls use IXL and Nala for their maths and English. Izzy is currently doing an arts course online via Cambridge so I would say that a lot of their learning is web-based. We still feel that the unstructured approach works for us, and that immersion into subjects that they really enjoy is more important than the learning of facts that they will never use is a waste of time.

Homeschooling in our family is more like just living our lives. There are some things we attempt to include every day, such as piano practice, fresh air and a bit of exercise and the regular chores. We take turns cooking, and the girls like baking (which I don't), and enjoy finding quite challenging recipes that require unusual ingredients and a lot of time. I am constantly surprised at the things my children know, and am forever asking them where they learned that, because it didn't come from me. It really busts this myth around having to forcefeed facts to them; they actually want to acquire knowledge themselves, and it seems to stick.

We live in Tramore, co Waterford and we have found it a great place to home educate. We are within walking distance of the library, the beach, the swimming pool, shops and cafés.

Favourite homeschooling memory so far

Having the beach and the library to ourselves during the academic year. Pajama days, all of us reading on the sofa under the blanket, long conversations about diverse topics, looking things up when we get stuck, watching them progress and develop into the people they are today - I can't really pick out a particular memory as this experience is still ongoing.



We can be out and about and interact with the public if we like, or we can be pretty much on our own on the backstrand. Waterford city is a 15 minute drive away, and there are plenty of activities here, from surfing to youth clubs and music classes. We have rarely encountered any negativity when people find out they are homeschooled. Mostly people are curious as to how it works, and then they would pass a "well, fair play to you" kind of comment.

A perfect homeschooling day would be one where we all feel at the end of the day, that it has been a productive one; creatively as well as academically.

For us, the biggest challenge has actually been the socialization bit. There are of course many meet-ups and events taking place all over the country, and we have attended some, as well as a few conferences. We have met some lovely families, but it's not the same as having people close by that you can meet on a regular basis. The girls have friends and they are active in their local community and with different classes, but it's not the same as having the regularity of seeing people every day, or at least, often. It's not a huge deal, and it's probably the only aspect for us that has been a little bit negative. Fortunately, my children are very, very close and can spend a lot of time together - they are best friends really - but we all would have liked

The moment that you absolutely knew you had made the right decision to homeschool

I think it was around 2012 when they started playing this imaginary game, that then went on for around three days, and became more and more elaborate as the days went on. It was amazing to watch what happened when they were left uninterrupted, and how many elements were included - from utilizing their imagination, creativity and cognitive capacities to the max, compromising on the directions the game was going, resolving disagreements around character development - it was pure learning through play.



Image by Alexas_Fotos from Pixabay

if there had been a bigger homeschooling community locally. They still love their home ed lives - according to themselves, anyway.

When I look back, I wouldn't change anything; of course there have been things that maybe didn't work so well, but that is all part of the learning experience for us adults too. Trust yourself and trust your children. We worry so needlessly about so many things, and we live in such a competitive culture, where so many people get caught up in whatever the common consensus might be. Think outside of the box, don't make decisions based on "what ifs". Question the narrative, especially if you feel that it doesn't sit well with you.

Feel the fear and do it anyway!!

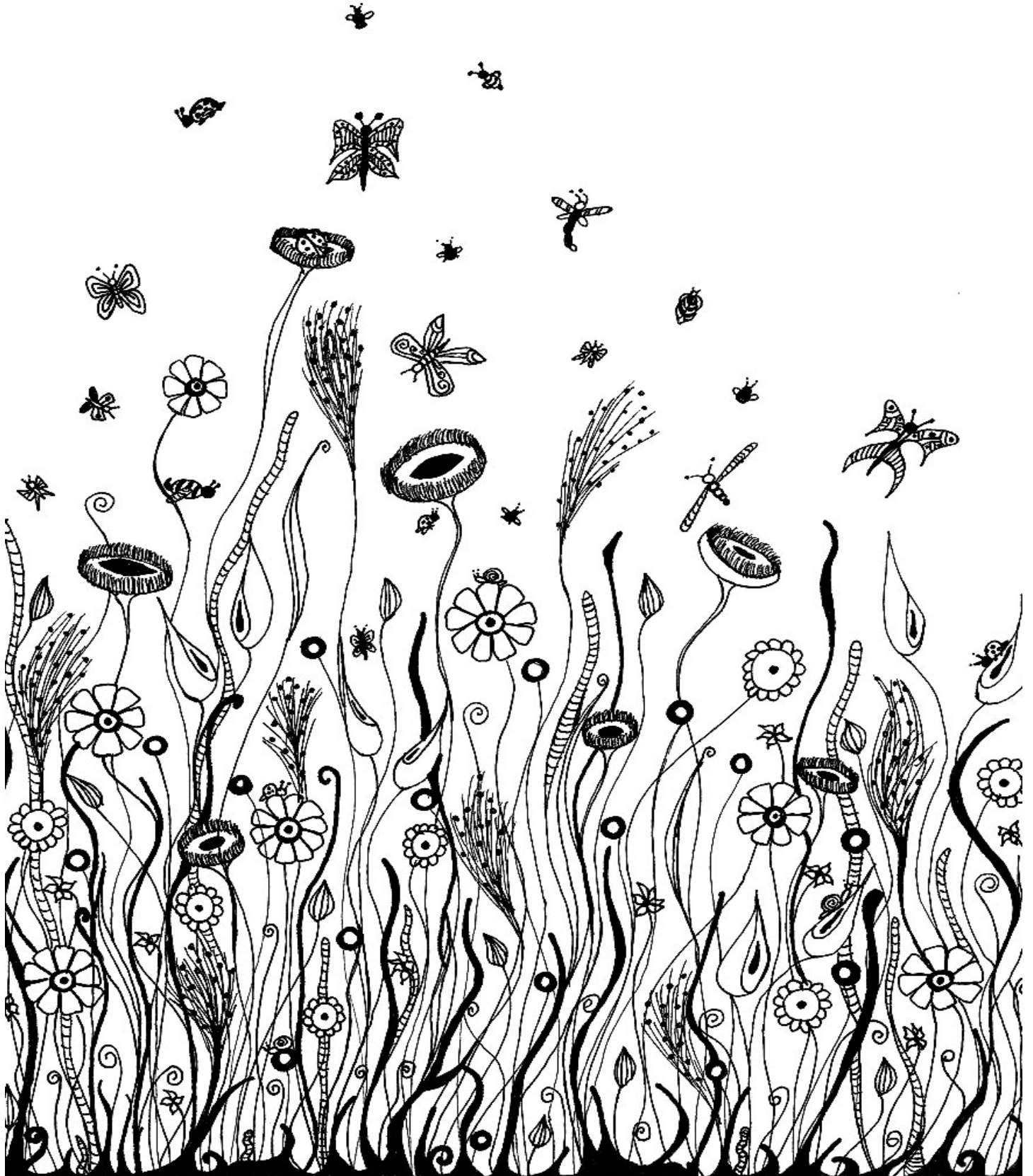
Angelica Grant

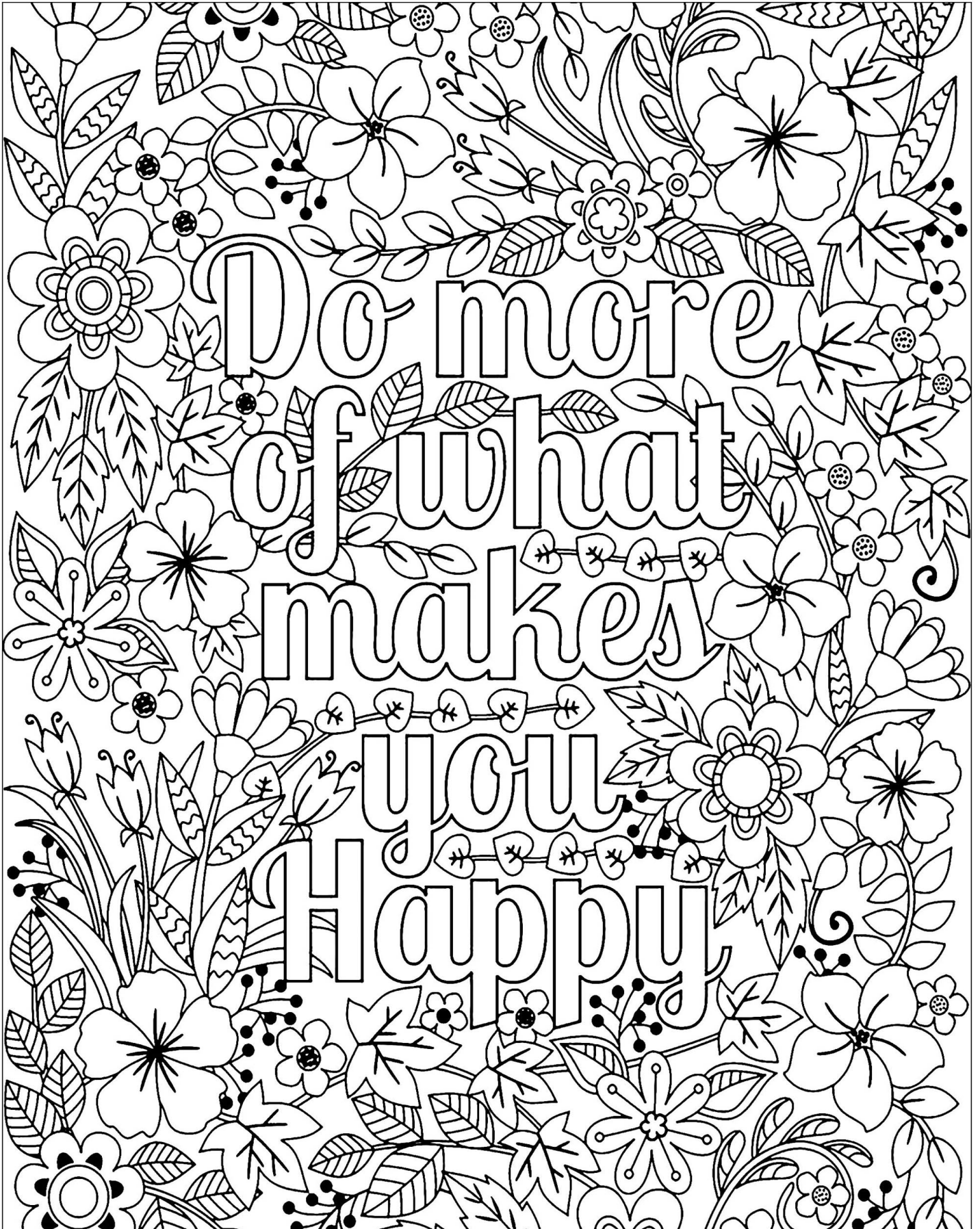
What does inspire you during difficult times?

I take great comfort in knowing that my children get to grow up as free thinking individuals, away from the pressure of conformity. They get to figure out who they are, and what they want to do.



Almost everybody knows that colouring is NOT only children's business. These pages are for YOU! But you can choose, of course, to turn them into a collaborative work of art.







Letters from Members

Hello everybody! We are a family of 5 and we are organising our move to Ireland next year. Do you have any suggestion on where is the best area to move to? [member from abroad]

Welcome to HEN! We are happy Ireland home edders community is growing. Yours is a difficult question, however; and to be honest, there is no straight answer. Ireland is not a big country, but there are differences between counties; point is that it is almost impossible to suggest anybody where to live. Our suggestions, therefore, is to travel a bit around Ireland before settling down, feel your way around for a while if you manage. Maybe get in touch with local homeschoolers groups, see what friendship you form. If you don't manage to take a sabbatical time travelling around, please remember that your decision on where to move to Ireland is not binding. You can always change location later on if you feel like it.

In any case, welcome to HEN community!

Do you have a burning question whose answer you think might benefit all? Do you have a question or a comment for the Editor or the NCB? Get in touch! newsletterhen@gmail.com We will publish your email - anonymously if you prefer - and you will get the answer in our next issue.

Funny sentences you hear in this house...

No, I did not know that the cat's anus moves when he coughs.

Please stop staring at the cat's anus.

No, I don't know if cats can get haemorrhoids.

Thanks for the suggestions, but no, I don't want to breastfeed the kitten.

No, I don't think you can assist the cat's neutering surgery. And no, it is not "only because you are young".

And when I was already reaching for the wine...

Mummy, this day has been like a fairy tale!

(I still reached for the wine, but this time to celebrate!)

Do you want to share a few sentences you find yourself saying out loud that seriously surprise you? Or something your child said that cracked you up? Pop us an email newsletterhen@gmail.com



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We would love Regional Contact Officers also for Antrim, Armagh, Clare, Derry, Donegal, Down, Fermanagh, Kilkenny, Leitrim, Louth, Roscommon, Tipperary, Westmeath and are currently recruiting! So if you have some time to spare and are happy to be the contact person locally, do get in touch. Positions are all on a volunteer basis, but there are perks: you get to know and help some amazing people! Plus, you get to choose when you are available and your preferred mean of contact. If you fancy being a part of the team, pop us an email: emails@henireland.org



Updates from NCB

HEN was formed 20 years ago to help and support families who were thinking of home educating or were actually already doing it. It is governed by a Constitution which is available on our website - www.henireland.org. Please remember that, as members, we all agree to abide to its terms. The HEN NCB (National Coordinating Body) consists of volunteer members who do what they can to help run the organisation. All Officers on the NCB have equal voting rights (the Chairperson has a casting vote in the case of a tie), but every attempt is made to reach agreement by consensus. There are a few meetings during the year, but much of the work of the NCB goes on outside of these meetings, due to the distances between us.

On this page we find updates from all the Officers, so that you can get a better idea of what the NCB is doing.

Chairperson: I have big shoes to fill in and I am trying to do this at the best of my capabilities. There is plenty going on. You will find regular updates from me on the Letter from the Chairperson at the beginning of the newsletter. Kevin

Secretary: I have been extremely busy in my life outside HEN and haven't been able to contribute as much as I would like to, so please accept my apologies for the absent minutes. We are working on a new way to produce and distribute them, so bear with us. Brendan

Treasurer: I have been following HEN finances as usual. Our situation is currently stable. On the NCB we are considering ways to improve it, so that we can do more in the near future. If you have ideas, do get in touch. Genie

Membership Officer: So many changes in just a few months! The website, the members only page, the local contacts, the mailing list to be reviewed... I have been very busy indeed! Lorna

Email Officer: Together with Lorna I have worked on the mailing list to improve its functionality. I have also started working on HEN social media profile; hopefully you have noticed the change. Anna

Contact Officer: Contacts from people that want to home educate have been increasing, this is why I am so glad now we have some many new local contacts. It is very important for new members to be able to find someone nearby; sometimes listening ears are all that is needed. Margaret

PR Officer: I have been working as hard as ever to rise the profile of home education on the media. So, when you see articles on the press, mentioning home education, you know that I am nearby. Thanks to the members who volunteered for the interview. Cora

Tusla Liasion: Keeping the relationship with TUSLA working is now as important as ever, so I have been quite busy with this in the past months due to the recent events. Annette

Newsletter Editor: Well, I guess what I have been up to is pretty clear, since you are reading this! I know I have been pestering everybody with my emails - and there will be more, I am afraid, so be forewarned. So, please, do stay on board, enjoy the newsletter, make it really yours and contribute to it! There is a chance to contribute for everybody and I am always available to help with the editing if you feel you might use some help, so don't be shy! We are also trying to create an archive of past issues of the newsletter; so if you have e-copies (as in: the pdfs) of the old ones, please do get in touch and send me a copy. Marta



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