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Adult Literacy Trust

Impact Report 2025/26

Helping adults start a new chapter



Our Work this Year



This year proved to be a key one for Adult Literacy Trust. Drawing on regular feedback from our learners, volunteers and from experts in the sector, we refined our operational and training model. Not least, we expanded our programme significantly, forging partnerships with leading teaching organisations across London, in order to deploy a growing stable of volunteers.

As outlined in this Impact Report, throughout the year our Reading Coaches developed constructive relationships with learners, focusing on their individual needs. They worked with individuals outside of the classroom to help to check learners’ understanding, and to build their confidence in reading. Volunteers also led small groups of learners in informal group learning sessions, working collectively to focus on developing the ability to navigate literacy challenges in everyday life, to boost confidence and life skills, as well as foster an overall appreciation for reading.

All of this marks a turning point in our young history. Adult Literacy Trust is working to make lifelong learning opportunities accessible to all, one individual at a time. Of course, we could not achieve this impact without the support of so many, including the passionate volunteers who are delivering our service offering on the front line, and the many individuals and institutions who this year contributed financially.




ROBERT GLICK OBE
CHAIR, ADULT LITERACY TRUST

About Adult Literacy Trust

Adult Literacy Trust (www.alt.org.uk) is a registered charity (no. 1193300), established in 2021 to give people with poor literacy skills access to the help they need to become successful readers, and to increase their life chances. We believe that literacy is a right, not a privilege, and want every adult to have the chance to gain this critical skill.

Through a unique programme of targeted and personalised support, we aim to break the cycle of exclusion and poor literacy among disadvantaged adults. We do this through one-to-one reading sessions, and as a complement to teaching in formal settings. Utilising specially trained volunteer Reading Coaches, we work closely with formal learning providers to identify adults who could benefit from enhanced support outside of the classroom, to strengthen and accelerate outcomes from participation in adult community education.



Our Year in Numbers

This year our Reading Coaches programme took place in eight London boroughs with high levels of disadvantage and ethnic diversity, supporting the 1 in 6 adults in England who are ‘functionally illiterate’ – lacking basic reading skills beyond primary school level, or below. The boroughs in which we operated include those that have higher than UK and London averages across several indicators for poverty, including out-of-work benefit claimants, adults living below the poverty line, employment inequity and those living in insecure housing.

Over the last year we supported more than 180 adult learners to improve their literacy, self-confidence, employability and wellbeing. Our programme assessment

– from weekly session records submitted by volunteers, structured learner and teacher interviews and an on-line survey of volunteers – shows very high levels of volunteer satisfaction and clear evidence that learners greatly value this form of support.

Deploying 136 specially trained volunteer Reading Coaches, we worked closely with formal learning providers, across nine teaching sites, to identify adults who could benefit from enhanced support, to strengthen outcomes from participation in adult community education and to improve life chances.



181

Adult Learners



136

Volunteer Reading Coaches



Operating in

8

London Boroughs

- Camden • Hackney • Islington
- Lambeth • Newham • Southwark
- Tower Hamlets • Westminster



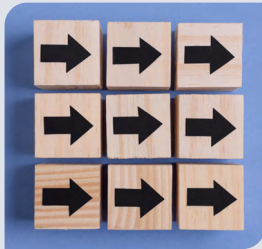
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Partner Organisations



£684

Supports one learner over the course of an academic year



100%

of our learners recommend the programme

Impact for Learners: Summary Findings

All learners surveyed this year were strongly positive about their volunteer-led reading practice sessions

As detailed in the following pages, learners reported that the improvements in their reading skills and confidence were already having profound and lasting benefits, improving employability, health and social outcomes. These include:

- ✓ **Enhanced skills to strengthen employability and job retention**
- ✓ **Improvements in wellbeing and better health indicators**
- ✓ **Significantly improved literacy confidence and skills, including equipping learners to progress in their education**
- ✓ **Greater engagement in community activities and support for their children's education**

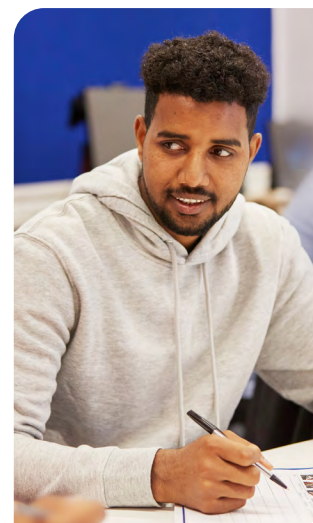
➔ **MORE THAN 90%** saw gains in their personal, family and everyday life, as well as in using technology.

➔ **99% REPORT** that the sessions have helped them to feel much more confident about reading, and to read more. A similar number said they now read more for pleasure, which we know plays such a critical role not just in building literacy skills, but in sparking curiosity that does so much to encourage lifelong learning.

➔ **MORE THAN 6 IN 10** learners said their engagement with ALT improved their wellbeing and social connectedness, whilst more than 5 in 10 saw gains in employment.

➔ **99% OF LEARNERS** surveyed said the sessions greatly increased their confidence – not only in their classes but, as important, outside the classroom in their wider lives.

➔ **95%** said the sessions helped them complete their English or Functional Skills course.



All learners recognised how invaluable literacy is in improving their life chances, employability, health and wellbeing, and so **unanimously recommended the sessions to other adult learners.**

Learners' Voice & Measuring Impact

Incorporating the voices of ALT's learners has always been a core principle of our organisation. We believe it is fundamental to ensure we are creating relevant, effective, and sustainable solutions, empowering our beneficiaries, and building trust between ALT and the community, by recognising that adult learners are best positioned to articulate their own needs and challenges.

We involve them in multiple ways, to ensure that the project addresses the actual issues rather than perceived problems, and that we are offering solutions that are specifically designed to fit the unique contexts and circumstances of the beneficiaries, increasing the likelihood of success and sustainability over the long-term.

We have put in place robust monitoring and evaluation. We collect data, both quantitative and qualitative, from multiple sources, including:

- Weekly detailed reading session reports, completed by volunteers
- An on-line survey of ALT-supported learners
- Structured interviews of learners, conducted by an external consultancy
- An on-line survey of teaching partners
- Structured interviews of teaching partners, conducted by an external consultancy
- An on-line survey of volunteers

DETAILED FINDINGS

Gains in Employment

In surveys and interviews

51%

of our learners reported that their ALT sessions have already greatly helped with activities related to employment. Gains were particularly noteworthy in respect to:

- ✓ Applying for jobs, enhancing their ability to find and retain decent-paying employment
- ✓ Succeeding at work, including notable self-reported examples of promotions, better jobs and boosted wages
- ✓ Starting a new job, in many cases marking their first experience of entering the workforce or securing formal employment
- ✓ It is notable that, even before the completion of their course, 16% of learners in the most recent cohorts have started a new role or new job

We know from third-party research* that adults who improved their literacy, and in particular those who passed their course, would have gained a wide range of additional important financial and professional benefits, including:

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

24%

increase in the likelihood of full-time employment

HIGHER EARNINGS:

Up to

65%

increase in annual wages between lowest and highest skills levels

CONFIDENCE AT WORK:

82%

of learners in employment said that they had increased their confidence at work



“ Learning to read has opened so many doors for me. It wasn’t always smooth sailing, but [my volunteer] Janine, stuck with me through it all. She never stopped encouraging me. Because of her, I found the courage to apply for a job I never thought was possible – and I landed it. This programme has helped me read, but it’s much more than that – it’s been a turning point in my life. ”

DETAILED FINDINGS

Benefits in Personal, Family and Civic Life

91%

of our learners report significant benefits in their personal and family life, including:

- ☒ Greater access to employment, housing and other social services
- ☒ Better health outcomes, including engaging with their NHS surgery, greater ability to read and comprehend medical instructions, prescription labels, and other health-related information, and generally to navigate the healthcare system more effectively
- ☒ Supporting their children with their education, by reading to/with them, helping with homework, and fostering a love of learning
- ☒ More opportunities to volunteer in their community
- ☒ Making social connections and general wellbeing

Research conducted by outside sources* confirms that adults who have enhanced their literacy skills will have secured a variety of significant personal and social advantages, including:

BETTER HEALTH OUTCOMES:

51%

increase in likelihood of self-reported good health (lower fatigue, depression; higher healthcare utilisation; better social wellbeing)

16%

less likely to have long-term health conditions

EFFECTIVE PARENTING:

3x

more likely to engage in reading activities with their children, enhancing intergenerational literacy

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:

53%

more likely to engage in community groups/ volunteer within their community

34%

increase in voting rate between lowest and highest literacy skills levels



“ I didn’t think learning at my age was possible, but my volunteer made me believe in myself. For the first time, I can read my daughter a bedtime story. That moment has meant everything to me – and I owe it to these sessions. ”

DETAILED FINDINGS

Benefits in Everyday Life

99%

of ALT learners reported that their reading practice sessions have greatly improved their confidence in reading and their self-confidence, yielding significant benefits in their everyday life, empowering them to engage more fully in their communities and workplaces. Examples most frequently cited include:

- ☒ Being able to access health information, news and other crucial resources to make informed decisions
- ☒ Better able to read travel information, including accessing public transport and reading street signage
- ☒ Confidence in using ATMs, accessing the internet and shopping
- ☒ Engaging more with official paperwork such as forms, letters from the NHS or schools
- ☒ Allowed them to enjoy reading more than they used to, including reporting enjoying reading fiction, most for the first time

Help with using Technology

68%

Learners reported that their ALT sessions have markedly improved their ability to use technology – so important in our increasingly knowledge-based economy, where we rely so heavily on the written word through communication technologies and devices. Benefits were pronounced in:

- ☒ Using the internet
- ☒ Accessing email and other on-line services
- ☒ Managing their personal finances



“ I used to feel left out – like life was happening around me and I couldn’t keep up. Since joining the programme, I can read signs, fill out forms, and even read a good book. It’s the little things every day that remind me how far I’ve come. ”

DETAILED FINDINGS

Gains in Education

Teacher surveys and interviews have revealed the range of important learner benefits in college, especially when compared with non-ALT supported students. Teachers noted that additional reading practice sessions have led to many positive learner outcomes, including:

- ✓ Higher course retention and increased engagement in class activities
- ✓ Accelerated in-course progress, including moving up the Ofqual English reading scale (for example to Entry Level 3 from Entry Level 2), on a fast-tracked basis – allowing learners to better navigate everyday literacy challenges and better preparing them to enter or remain in the workforce
- ✓ Increased end-of-course achievement, including pass rates

Learners too reported that their ALT sessions helped with their studies, and that the personalised attention allowed them to focus on specific areas where they struggled, such as vocabulary, pronunciation, or comprehension. They reported that:

95%

Helped them to complete their English or Functional Skills course, ensuring they gained fluency and increased their participation and enjoyment

49%

Equipped them to apply for further study or start another qualification

Independent studies* consistently indicate that the improved literacy skills such as those gained in their ALT sessions carry significant advantages to learners, including:

LIFELONG LEARNING:
3x

more likely to engage in further education or professional development

IMPROVED EDUCATION OUTCOMES:

Better performance across all subjects, including maths and numeracy, due to enhanced reading comprehension and critical thinking skills



“ I used to sit quietly in class, afraid I’d be called on to read out loud. Now I raise my hand. It’s like someone turned the lights on. I understand things now. I want all my classmates to have this gift too. I want everyone here to feel this proud. ”

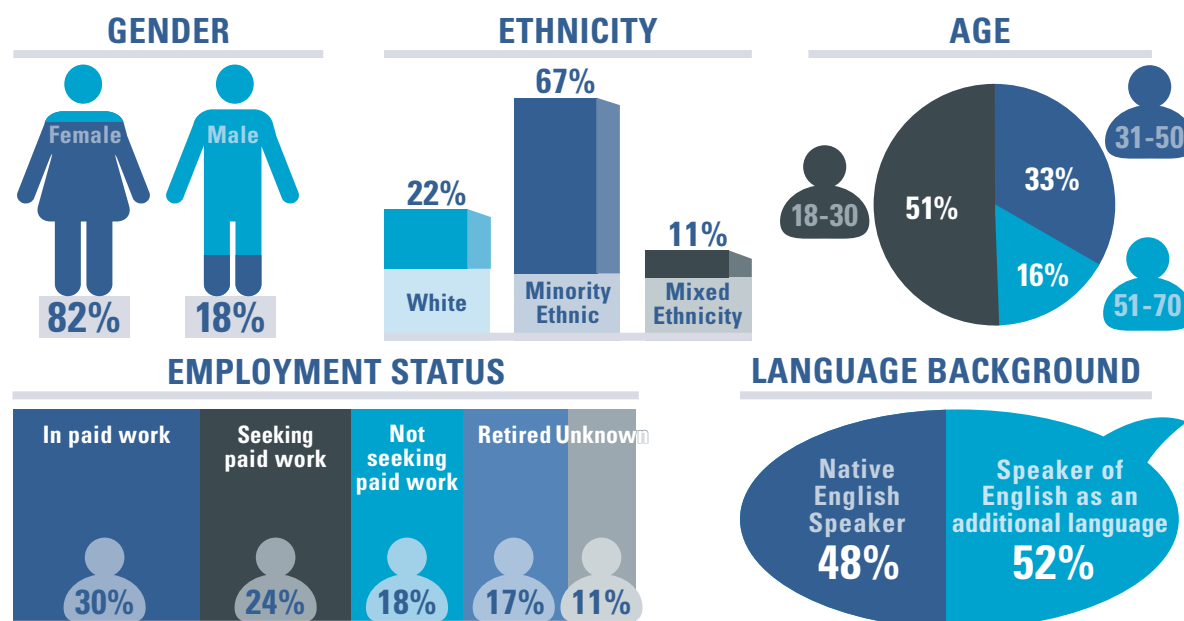
Learner Profiles

Given that low adult literacy levels both cause and result from increased indicators of intersectional disadvantage – including poverty, learning disabilities/differences, unemployment/underemployment and poor health – we intentionally worked with teaching partners and in local authority areas that have high levels of disadvantage amongst their populations. This year the Reading Coaches programme took place in the London Boroughs of Camden, Hackney, Islington, Lambeth, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Westminster.

The majority of our beneficiaries (78%) are from ethnic minority or mixed ethnicity communities,

most are speakers of English as an additional language (52%), and more than 80% are female. Close to a quarter (24%) of our adult learners were looking to improve their literacy in order to actively seek paid employment – many for the first time.

This year we primarily supported learners at Entry Levels 2 and 3 of the Ofqual English reading scale* – meaning learners who have some very basic reading skills (e.g. the ability to write their address on an official form or read simple words), but who would struggle to read a short letter or email, or to understand the main points of an unfamiliar text.



Learner Motivations

Participants have told us their primary motivations for enrolling in ALT Reading Sessions included:

- Access to education
- Employment prospects
- Help with children's learning
- Improve English skills
- Independence



Word cloud of motivations to enrol in ALT volunteer-led reading sessions.

Case Study 1

About the learner: Amina

Amina grew up in Somalia and moved to the UK as a young adult. She lives in east London with her two young children and works part-time as a cleaner. Although confident in spoken English, she has long struggled with reading, particularly longer texts, official letters and unfamiliar vocabulary.



These difficulties affected Amina's independence and her confidence as a parent. She found it hard to read school letters, support homework or share books at home, and worried that her own struggles might hold her children back as they began learning to read. Determined to support their early learning and break a cycle she recognised from her own experience, Amina enrolled on an English course at her local college, where she was introduced to Adult Literacy Trust.

About the volunteer: Helen

Helen works in full-time employment in the financial services sector. An enthusiastic reader with no previous experience in adult literacy support, she was drawn to volunteering with ALT by the opportunity to make a practical difference through one-to-one support.



The Reading Coach Sessions and Benefits

From their first session, Helen and Amina focused on reading materials that reflected everyday family life. Together they worked through letters from school, homework guidance, simple storybooks and short children's texts, helping Amina build confidence in reading aloud and explaining meaning.

Helen encouraged Amina to read at her own pace, breaking unfamiliar words into smaller parts and using pictures and context to infer meaning. Crucially, the sessions focused on equipping Amina with practical strategies she could use at home, enabling her to support her children's reading independently and consistently, rather than relying on others or avoiding reading altogether.

As Amina's confidence grew, reading became a shared daily activity at home. She began reading regularly with her children, visiting the library together, and talking about stories and new words. This shift has helped embed reading as a positive, normal part of family life - strengthening her children's early literacy skills while also modelling perseverance and confidence in learning.



While Amina's college teacher has noted increased participation and confidence in class, the most significant impact has been intergenerational. Amina now feels able to actively support her children's learning, engage confidently with their school, and play a central role in shaping their educational experience.

“Before, I was scared to read in front of my children. Now we read together every day. They see me trying, and I see them growing. I feel like I am changing things for them – and for me. AMINA”

Impact for Volunteers

Volunteers – recruited and extensively trained by the organisation – remain at the very heart of what we do

Our Volunteer Experience Survey revealed the many reasons why people chose to volunteer with us this year. Some have had experience of reading issues or needs themselves, while others have friends, family or loved ones who experience poor literacy. Others were interested in gaining work experience or increasing their confidence and self-esteem, hoping it might even lead to a career in the voluntary sector or education professions. Others told us they were motivated by the simple desire to help.

Our volunteer survey this year indicated that alongside their support to learners, our volunteers also significantly benefitted from the programme, including:



65% Building practical, transferrable skills including communication, coaching and mentoring, and gaining experience that improves their employability

75% Improving wellbeing and engagement in the community

95% Found volunteering with ALT interesting and enjoyable

This year more than
135
people generously gave their time to our cause, without whom we simply could not deliver our service.

The overwhelming majority of volunteers –
95%
– report they are making a positive difference in their community.

More than
90%
of the volunteers returned to the programme this year.



Looking Ahead

As we begin to roll out the programme more widely, the permanent feedback system that we have put in place described above will ensure we are constantly listening to the needs of the community and on a continuous journey of improvement.

Lessons learned are informing the roll-out of future cohorts. We share this feedback provided with our network of specialist stakeholders involved in adult learning, who are assisting in the regular review and design of our programme, in order to ensure we can deliver the maximum impact to our beneficiaries.

Case Study 2

About the learner: Nadia

Nadia was born and raised in south London and is in her mid-thirties. She has dyslexia, which was not identified when she was at school, but was formally diagnosed in adulthood. That diagnosis was a turning point, helping Nadia understand why reading and writing had always felt so difficult, but it did not, on its own, give her the confidence to move forward.



Growing up, Nadia learned to hide her difficulties and left education believing she was “not academic.” As an adult, she spent years in low-paid, insecure work, avoiding roles and applications that involved written forms or training. Determined to build a more secure future, Nadia enrolled on an English course at her local college, where she was introduced to Adult Literacy Trust and matched with a volunteer Reading Coach.

About the volunteer: Tom

Tom works full-time in a professional services firm and has experience mentoring colleagues, but no prior background in adult literacy support. Through ALT’s training, Tom developed a keen understanding of how dyslexia can affect confidence as much as skills. He focuses on creating sessions that are practical, patient and encouraging, helping Nadia rebuild trust in her own ability to read.



The Reading Coach Sessions and Benefits

From the outset, Nadia and Tom focused their sessions on practical, employment-related reading tasks. Together they worked through job descriptions, application forms and workplace policies – texts Nadia had spent years avoiding.



Tom encouraged Nadia to slow down and take control of the reading process. They broke texts into manageable sections, read aloud when helpful, and revisited challenging passages without pressure. Crucially, Tom reinforced that difficulty did not mean failure, helping Nadia replace years of self-doubt with persistence and confidence.

This consistent, supportive approach has proved transformative. As the sessions progressed, Nadia began to see written text as something she could manage rather than fear. She practised reading job application questions aloud and drafting responses during sessions, gradually approaching these with confidence instead of anxiety. Outside the sessions, she noticed tangible changes at work: she no longer avoids rotas, notices or training materials, and feels more comfortable engaging with colleagues and supervisors.

Within months, Nadia applied for roles she would previously have ruled out, and with the same employer successfully secured a permanent, full-time position with regular hours and opportunities for progression. And while her diagnosis of a learning disability helped Nadia understand herself, it was the relationship with her Reading Coach – the structure, encouragement and practical strategies Tom provided – that unlocked her ability to act on that understanding.

“Finding out I have dyslexia helped me understand my past, but meeting Tom changed what I thought was possible for the future. He didn’t rush me or judge me. He showed me I could do this. Getting my permanent job was the moment I realised I wasn’t limited - I just needed the right support. **NADIA**”

Advocacy

Calls for urgent action to tackle the crisis in adult literacy

In addition to delivering volunteer Reading Coaches, this year again saw ALT be very active on the advocacy front, encouraging sensible, effective policies and programmes designed to provide high-quality lifelong opportunities for all. Most notably, we led a broad, sector-wide effort to identify barriers and potential solutions to the falling participation in adult literacy learning, and the failure of existing government support schemes to reverse that slide. We engaged

with a number of educational establishments, education charities and other relevant organisations to continue promoting a vital Policy Paper, that identifies workable, easily implementable solutions to overcome many of the current barriers, including streamlining access to funding, incentivising providers to focus more on adult literacy, raising the national focus on basic skills, and developing new ways of recruiting and retaining both literacy teachers and learners.

"Together we can eradicate poor adult literacy in the UK."

3million+

Op-ed pieces, national radio interviews, social media and other media platforms yielded a wide audience for our key advocacy messages this year.

ALT Trustee Alex Stevenson talks about the importance of adult literacy to a national television audience.

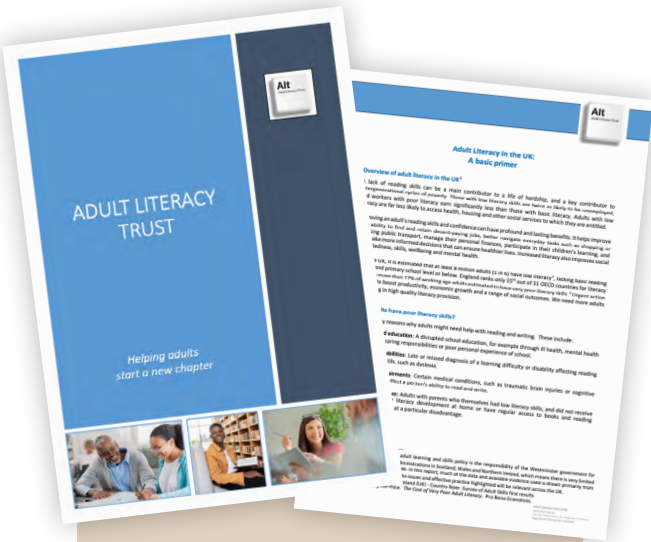
ALT led efforts to bring together key stakeholders in the sector to advocate for the real change needed to get more adults participating in high quality literacy provision.

ALT Chair Robert Glick leads a coalition meeting with Skills Minister Baroness Jacqui Smith to outline the urgent reforms needed to boost adult literacy levels.

Production of a vital Policy Paper that aims to engage the Department for Education and other key stakeholders on the reforms needed to increase adult literacy levels.

Contributions to the Sector

ALT operates on the basis that all materials, collateral and information it produces should be shared on an “open-source” basis, to the benefit of the entire adult learning sector. This year we made great progress in several areas, including:

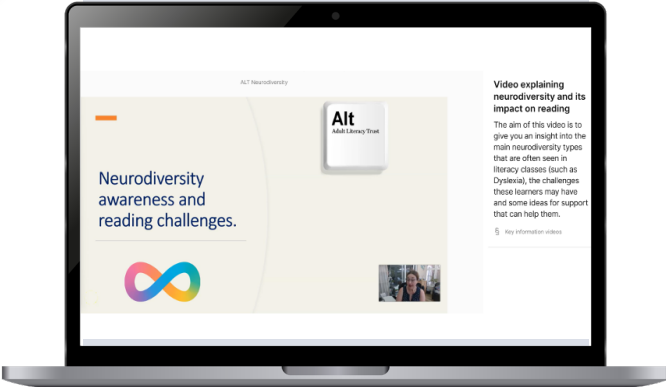


Essential Background on the Issue

We refreshed our much-cited and first-of-its-kind **Basic Primer** on the field of adult literacy, covering the scale and nature of the challenge in the UK.

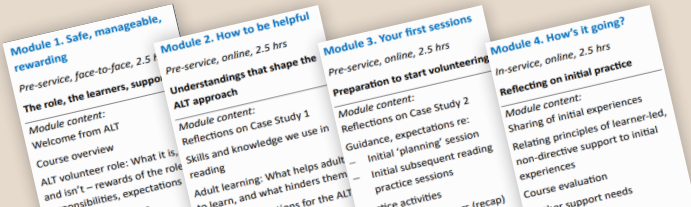
Innovative Video Guides

We have developed a series of highly impactful video guides explaining various elements of the programme to new and prospective volunteers – at ALT and across the wider sector. Topics include: Understanding neurodiversity and its impact on reading; understanding the unique challenges of ESOL learners; an explainer on Functional Skills qualifications; and much more.



Best-in-class Training

We have developed an extensive, specialised training curriculum on best practices so that volunteers can deliver the most effective coaching and outcomes for the learners with whom they will be working, and so that they can grow and develop their own abilities. The programme includes four taught modules, which are delivered both face-to-face and online. In addition to helping participants process and understand programme content, this approach also offers participants opportunities to interact and get to know one another, laying the foundations for networks of peer support.



Alt

Adult Literacy Trust

We are grateful to have secured support for our programme through a combination of individual, corporate and foundation gifts, including from the following generous organisations:



alt.org.uk