



HEN
NEWSLETTER

*“Winter is the time for comfort,
for good food and warmth,
for the touch of a friendly hand
and for a talk beside the fire”*

Edith Sitwell

FALL/WINTER 2020



Editor's Note

Dear all, what a peculiar year we have had! 2020 will certainly stay in our memories, won't it? Doubly so in our children's, as much as we might wish they will forget it.

I was hoping to give you an Autumn edition, but there were some glitches and, in the end, I thought it would make more sense to create an Autumn and Winter one. You will find all the usuals, from the colouring pages to the recipes, from the interviews with members to your contributions. Missing are the pictures from our local contacts; let's hope we will be able to share soon what we have been up to in a group.

I have to admit that, as much as the Newsletter is yours, for the past year, in each Newsletter issue, you have also had a glimpse of me. It is kind of inevitable, the Editor does put their mark on the newsletter, as I am sure happened with the previous ones, whether it is in the design, in the content or in the way it is written. I see this as a richness, not because I believe Editors in general are overly interesting persons—although I am sure a lot are! - but because with each, you can get a glimpse in a particular nuance of HEN membership. Obviously everybody is welcome to volunteer and to contribute, which, in the long run, makes it for an interesting overview. As I said, after all, no Editor lasts forever and that is, indeed, also in my case since I have decided to resign.

I want to thank you all, I have really enjoyed putting my Editor hat back on and I really want to thank everybody that got in touch with me during the past year, whether to contribute to the Newsletter or simply to say hi or thank you. I hope to meet everybody in person sooner or later, maybe, who knows, at a future Gathering. If you want to stay in touch with me, please pop me an email to my personal address: meleusina@yahoo.it or find me on Facebook.

In the meantime and in any case, I hope you enjoy this issue and that, despite what is going on, it gives you a sense of belonging. Even when, for whatever reason, we are apart, please remember that we do share a path. We might be different in everything else, and even in the way we home educate, but all of us made this choice, ultimately, out of love for our children. And, again, in that love, we can certainly all find each other.

I wish you all really the best possible end of 2020, and may 2021 see us in our tribe, nurturing ourselves and our connections.

Here is to hugs and warm smiles!

Marta Dorigo Salamon

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ChickLit's Editor's Note

I just wanted to thank you everybody that contributes to our ChickLit, do keep sending your pictures, your stories and everything you would like to see included in it.

Theo Monaghan, Chicklit editor

A personal thank you to Theo, the ChickLit editor: thanks for putting up with my last minute requests, fluctuating deadlines and general suggestions.

Marta Dorigo Salamon



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A Goodbye from Kevin



Dear all,

wow what a year we've had! Our lives have changed so much during the past few months and, as I wrote for the AGM, now so many of our normal ways of doing things seem to be impossible and so many of the new ways of working have now become our usual ways.

I wish all the best to the new NCB and I strongly hope that after the pandemic passes we'll be able to continue to organise our meet-ups, gatherings and other events.

In the meantime, I wish you all also a merry Christmas.

Kevin O'Kelly - previous Chairperson





Pronouns

This is a father-daughter two-hander about treating people sensitively: by listening to them, and by not making assumptions about who they are and what they need. On the face of it, it's about gender; but if we can tidy up the pronouns, then we're half-way to being kinder to each other between generations and among nations. We don't need to understand everything to respect people and meet them where they are.

I am The Patriarchy: ticking all the boxes: old ✓, white ✓, straight ✓, male ✓, educated ✓, wealthy ✓, (retired). But I'd like to think I am *Down with The Gays*. A couple of years ago, The Institute where I work dealt with the problem of gender-neutral bathrooms by putting the ♀ symbol on the wheel-chair access toilets. At an unrelated tea-and-canapés event later, I ripped into The President over this cheap, signage, solution to what the management considered a metaphysical issue rather than something that marginalised a chunk of our community.

I've been active in my attempts to get *Down with the Pronouns*. And I've added {he | him | his} to my e-mail sig on the grounds that if everybody does it, then it's easier for those who might otherwise get **othered**. It's taken 40 years, but we are finally replacing Mrs/Miss with a term Ms that doesn't care whether a woman is married or not . . . erm, like Mr. A parallel status/ title journey is progressing about sex / gender so people won't be defined by their pronouns. Because it really shouldn't matter! Word on the street is that, as a default position, singular 'they' works in most cases.

My younger daughter Nisa has been coronactive in her attempts to get down with a foreign language. As a Foodie, she has naturally concentrated on DuoLingo French. As a raised monoglot anglophone, she's worn out by *tous les mots* having M/F gender. "*tous les mots*" is not just the articles la/le/les and un/une/des and the

pedantic noun endings *cousin / cousine*; but the fact that any attached adjectives have to agree as well: *votre beau cousin* but *ma belle cousine*.

You may google up "*pronoms non-binaire*". Seems the most common N-B pronoun is *iel* which helpfully sounds different from *il* or *elle*. But it's still fluid; some French folks are kiting *al ol ul* and *yul*. The ultra-conservative patriarchal *L'Académie française* has yet to add its imprimatur to *iel*. Indeed in 2017 the academy had kittens about inclusive language «*devant cette aberration inclusive, la langue française se trouve désormais en péril mortel, ce dont notre nation est dès aujourd'hui comptable devant les générations futures*» translated as "in the face of this inclusive aberration, the French language finds itself in **mortal danger**, and today's users will find themselves answerable to succeeding generations". There is an academic debate about whether trans/gender issues are easier or harder in countries with gendered grammar.

A while back, courtesy of the Students Union, which is much more *down with the gays* than The Management, I attended a Diversity & Inclusion Day. I picked up some clobber: rainbow wrist-bands, and a diversity badge to wear on my lab coat next to my **I ♥ Science button**. For the next two years I have been wearing [with pride] my rainbow wrist-band. The band and badge are tiny enough that it's not in your face but large enough to suggest that I am a BLT ally. A bit like the Fáiinne to show that you are *down with the gaeilgeoiri*.





You don't have to be gay or gender-fluid to join the LGBT+ Society, you just need your heart in the right place enough to support other people's right to be their true selves - a BLT Ally. Diversity & Inclusion Day included an, embarrassingly poorly attended, workshop on pronouns led by the SU Welfare & Equality Officer. They spent most of their talk on how to do gender-naming in the Trans world; and there the issue seems quite straight-forward. Trans people acquired a pink or a blue babygro shortly after birth but, at some later stage, switched strips. They prefer to be addressed in the gender that they've landed in rather than the one they were assigned (after a quite cursory peek between their neonatal legs) at birth. No surprises there but you can't be sure, so it's polite to ask "what are your pronouns?" For many, the transition has been drawn out, invasive, expensive and traumatic, and to address them by their 'dead name' or pronoun is tiresome and/or offensive.

In the maternity hospitals of Ireland there are just two boxes M [] and F []. 98.3% of new borns fit obviously and easily into one box or other - it just takes a peek down there. But for ~17 of 1,000 live births there is some discrepancy in the arrangement of the external genitalia or other sex-defining characteristics - at least 35 named variations on the genital theme have been clocked between F and M. The midwife snaps a decision because The Form in binary. 1.7% is nearly 8x more than people registered blind.

Being Trans is no picnic! Gender re-assignment is invasive, expensive, traumatic and maybe 2 years long depending on how far down the road you're prepared to go with hormones and surgery. It can be brutal being gender-wrong so support is needed:

- you get bullied all through school
- you can't use the available toilets
- clothes shopping is fraught with stress
- you can't get a good haircut
- suicide attempts are 3x more likely;
- self-harm is 2x more likely;
- stress, anxiety and depression 4x more likely.

So let's cut all folk some slack in the Bathroom Wars. Trans people, no more than HENies, are not defined by being Other, they are just like other folk except in this one dimension: cross, kind, selfish, generous, lazy, honest, faithless, thoughtful,

Pronouns by Andrew Lloyd and Esme Baldwin

avaricious, diverse and, well, wonderful in that diversity.

But what do I know? I'm the Patriarchy. So I asked my older daughter and she replied . . .

Advice by Esme Lloyd-Baldwin

The above is a bit philosophical and theoretical so here is some practical advice!

Parental support is often stated as key to young people's well-being and self-acceptance. As stated above, LGBT+ youth, particularly transgender youth, face much higher rates of depression, homelessness and more severe mental health issues than their peers. Remember that you don't have to understand everything, but love, support and respect are vital!

Mistakes with pronouns are okay, just correct yourself and move on rather than make a big deal apologising. Try and fix the situation by asking how you can support someone better rather than over-apologising for mistakes. Particularly in public over-apologising can make someone uncomfortable and awkward, you can always have a quiet word later.

If you're trying to get used to someone's new pronouns a great way to build the habit is to use their name and pronouns even when they're not around. This helps you feel more comfortable using them and mean you're less likely to slip up.

Having genuine dialogue is important; as is being able to admit when you're wrong, unsure or ignorant about something. If you're uneasy about terminology or a situation, either meet someone and ask how you can correct yourself or use some of the resources below to learn more!

Gender identity [who you are] and sexual identity [whom you fancy] are different things!

Above all, just be sound. Try your best. The person you love is still the same person and your support is invaluable.

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



Resources by Esme Lloyd-Baldwin

www.Teni.ie - Advice on gender identity issues and with general questions.

www.belongto.org - Ireland's LGBT+ youth support group; includes a lot of helpful advice for parents and young people.

www.lgbt.ie - Support and advice for both LGBT+ people and their families, includes helplines.

Glossary Some common terms: their definition (Irish)

LGBTI+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans+ and intersex people. (LADTI+)

Sexual Orientation: Sexual and romantic attraction. (Gnéaschlaonadh)

Heterosexual: Someone who is attracted to people of a different gender. (Heitrihgnéasach)

Lesbian: A woman who is mainly attracted to other women. (Leispiach)

Gay: Someone who is mainly attracted to people of the same gender. (Aerach)

Bisexual: Someone who is attracted to people of the same gender and also to people of other genders. (Déghnéasach)

Gender identity: Our deeply felt internal experience of our own gender. (Fhéiniúlacht Inscne)

Gender expression: How we show our gender through our clothing, hair, behaviour, etc. (Nochtadh Inscne)

Transgender: People whose gender identity differs from the sex they were given at birth. Trans+ includes non-binary people. (Trasinscneach)

Intersex: People who are born with variations in their sexual anatomy or their hormonal patterns, variations that are not seen as fitting in with typical male or female bodies. (Idirghnéas)

Cisgender: Someone who identifies with the gender assigned to them at birth, someone who is not transgender or non-binary. (Cis-inscneach)

Non-binary: People whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female. Some non-binary people use they/them pronouns. (Neamh-dhénártha)

Photo by Nick Fewings on Unsplash





Just a normal family life

My name is Meadhbh O'Leary and I have three girls, now aged 18, 15 and 12. I have always been interested in education and learning. After my degree in Music, I studied to be a primary teacher in Limerick. I then returned to UCC to do my Masters in Education. In the course of those years I read a lot about education and school as a means of controlling the masses and legitimising the inequalities in society and how those in power also controlled the education system and allowed a society to be perpetuated that supported the dominant classes. This intrigued me; I was always questioning structures and institutions, so that was already in my nature.

When my eldest was four I was attending La Leche League and I loved the philosophy of Attachment Parenting and both my husband David and I heartily embraced it as our parenting style.

Then, one day, I picked up a book from the La Leche library called *The Unschooling Handbook*. This was a lightbulb moment for me:



it combined my philosophies on education and our commitment to attachment parenting. I knew the reality of a classroom very well having taught in a primary school for 10 years and I knew I didn't want my four year old sitting down all day, with 10 minutes to eat her lunch, enduring the sensory overload of a classroom. I was on a career break so my initial plan was to send Éabha to school when my career break ended in 2 or 3 years. Although that extended a little! So far, my eldest daughter Éabha started school for the first time in transition year when she was 15 and a half.

Photo by Jordan Whitt on Unsplash

She stayed in school then and is awaiting her Leaving Cert predicted grades. My two other girls, Rowen and Melody aged 15 and 12, spent an enjoyable few months in a Sudbury school last year. They are currently unschooling again.

Homeschooling and parenting are inextricably linked for us. The children continued to play - which of course is the child's work! - and we continued to be attached parents. We did no formal lessons and had no 'school books'. So while David was working full time I was the parent in charge of the home but we were both parenting our unschooled children around the clock!

We were also involved with our friends (both schooled and unschooled) our communities and the wider world. Through the years the children have been involved in many extra-curricular activities, art classes, drama, ballet, modern dance, Irish dancing, musical theatre, football, tennis, gymnastics, horse-riding and more.



They were in orchestras for years; they are in choirs - all three are involved in a Barbershop Choir. They performed in many plays, pantos and musicals. They play a mixture of classical (violin, cello, piano) and traditional music (fiddle, flute, tin whistle, banjo) and play in Comhaltas bands.

Photo by Clem Onojeghuo on Unsplash



The older two have worked locally as well; both spent years working for a local art teacher doing afterschool art classes with groups of children. The second girl worked a day a week in Ballymaloe shop here locally.

Through the years we met with other homeschooling families for shared activities and fun for example we attended many plays and concerts. We organised science workshops and attended classes in The Blackrock Observatory. We were involved with home ed bookclubs and home ed markets and concerts. They are all voracious readers.



Obviously as my eldest is now 18 the above lists of activities spanned a lot of years! Our home now consists of five people often with different agendas for the day. Now that they are all older they spend a huge amount of time socialising! The eldest is working, until she goes to college in September. We live by the sea so they go swimming, kayaking and pier jumping regularly. The youngest is very self

directed and focused. She organises her day very methodically. She is doing maths online with Kahn academy and is covering Irish with me. She also spends time 'composing' musicals on the piano and writing books. She is currently using a sewing machine to make scrunchies to sell locally. The 15 year old started formal maths a year ago with a local teacher. She covered the honours Junior Cert curriculum in that time. She spends every other available minute socialising or organising her social life.

I was a great believer in my own ability to learn anything I wanted so it didn't surprise me when they learned just as easily. It was always a delight and a joy when I realised they had learned a new skill unbeknownst to me. I loved observing them reading without them ever having been 'taught' in the conventional way. But I think I had read so much about how people learn from life that it never surprised me when they did just that! I think I always knew that it was the right decision for us.

My homeschooling memories are normal family memories. I loved hearing my children playing, especially enacting dramatic storylines on their own or with friends while I sat reading and breastfeeding the youngest and my husband cooked us a delicious family meal. (Daughter number 2 says "way to make us sound like the Brady Bunch!")

We live in a fishing village in East Cork. It is a nice community. I love it here. We have lots of friends here so I didn't find it isolating. I'm sure some people have doubts about the wisdom of us homeschooling but our girls are so outgoing and involved in the community that they forgot about it rather quickly.

Photo by Jared Craig on Unsplash

What is your biggest challenge in homeschooling?
I think for the kids... it was the experience of being different. They didn't like having to explain themselves every time they met someone new. They would have preferred to have blended in ...unnoticed!



Sometimes I wonder if the eldest might have preferred to be in school by Secondary School. It is hard for a teenager to be different. Having said that daughter number two would not have been able to keep up her vast social life if she had been curtailed by school. In the end, the eldest started school at 15 and a half. I think initially she was very surprised at how little people knew. I think she had assumed they would know so much more than her. She was relieved she hadn't had the stress of the Junior Cert yet was not behind academically. When I asked her she said she is glad she was homeschooled until she was 15. She has enjoyed the last three years of school and feels that three years was plenty.

Daughter number 2, Rowen, says she is glad she has been homeschooled as it has given her the option to be friends with kids of different ages (a lot are older than her) from different schools and backgrounds. And Also the time to maintain those friendships. She is very confident in her ability to learn. She is intending to go to school in Transition year next September. Daughter number 3, Melody, says she didn't really know any different. Homeschooling was just her life. She is definitely intrigued by school now though, so she may try it out at a younger age than her sisters.

Overall, I think I chose not to send my children to school because of my overriding belief that life is too short. We don't know how long we've got, or how long our children have, so I wanted to be around to parent mine. Being a mother has been the most rewarding experience of my life. And the cliché 'that childhood goes fast' is so true!

What does inspire you during difficult times?
My husband's support! His absolute belief and faith in me and in the fact that we were doing the right thing!

Carpe Diem! Don't be afraid ...and trust in your child's innate ability to learn. Once a child is feeling safe and loved and unstressed s/he will learn and thrive. Childhood is a most precious time. Enjoy your children and take care of yourselves too!

Photo by Ines Iachelini on Unsplash





Reviews



Historopedia - The Story of Ireland from Then Until Now by Fatti and John Burke - Gill Books

We love this book. If your child is a visual learner, chances are you will love it too. The graphic is cartoonish like, with plenty of facts. The tone is informal and funny, so we found it entertaining which is always a plus when attention can be flickery. Obviously it gives only an overview, but in perfect home education style you can research further any topic that you find interesting. Bonus points because you can find it at the library!



The Wonder of Trees by Nicola Davies and Lorna Scobie

Another great tool for visual learners! Beautifully illustrated and with lots of factual and scientific information. It does not focus on one specific climate, but provides informations across continents. It provides a great overview exploring also the relationship between animals and trees, climate and trees and people and trees. There is also a glossary on the end. Bonus points because you can find it at the library!

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!



Fairy Kisses Biscuits

These biscuits in Italian are called “Baci di Dama” (Dame’s Kisses) but we prefer to call them Fairy Kisses. They are rather easy to make and super tasty.

Ingredients

200 gr almond flour (or 200 gr almonds and you can simply grind them)

200 gr flour (we used wholemeal spelt)

150 gr butter (we used coconut butter, but you can use 200 gr regular butter)

100 gr xylitol (you can use sugar, but then you would need 150 gr)

70 gr chocolate (80% cocoa works best)

Steps

1. If you have almonds, you need to grind them to make them into flour
2. In a bowl, mix the almond flour with the xylitol
3. Add the flour
4. In a little pan, melt the butter and add it into the mix.
5. Work the dough with your hands – if needs be add flour till you can work it without getting your fingers all sticky.
6. Once the dough is easy to work with, make little balls (roughly 3cm across).
7. Put them on a tray into the oven set at around 180°C.
8. Cook them for roughly 15 minutes (they need to be firm, you can check by eating one).
9. In the meantime, melt the chocolate in bain-marie
10. When the biscuits are cooked and cooled down a bit, cut them in half.
11. Stick the biscuits back together by spreading melted chocolate in the middle and then press them. Once the chocolate is cooled down, it will keep the two halves together.

Enjoy and good luck trying to them make last!



Marta Dorigo Salamon and Rebecca Aileeb Farinella



Growing up homeschooler: Séamus 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.

My name is Seamus Ong. My home education journey started when I was 8. I hated school and did not get on well. I was a quiet child and not really engaged with the teacher. I can definitely say that school was a challenge for the years I attended it. From my experience, I feel the school is not a great system; they push exams, it is all about collecting as many As as you possibly can, cramming information into your head and then throwing it up on the paper. I don't think this is really education. I have recently discovered that the word education comes from "ex-ducere", which means bringing forth. School didn't bring anything out of me; I was actually getting more closed up. Home education, on the contrary, broaden my interests and my opportunities.

There is so much pressure in school too; home education is so much more relaxed - this is so important for your mental health. There are a lot of people coming out of schools and they instantly feel like a weight is being lifted off from their shoulder.

Over the years, my average day has changed quite a bit.

I have learnt mostly from what interested me at different times. When I started it was sports, so hurling, football; I was in the local GAA team. I was not really into reading or writing; so I learnt writing by writing down football scores and reading by reading the newspaper's sporting articles.

Nature was also interesting for me. One day I decided to do a project about birds, so I did some research, got a book and spent my time with the binoculars looking for birds. I remember my mum

got really annoyed and actually thought that home education was not really working. I wasn't doing any big project, there was nothing that she could show that actually demonstrated I had learnt anything. Yet, one morning we were in the local park and I stroke a conversation with a man there about nature and wildlife. My mum was astonished; the education was there, because I had read the book and I was interested in it, so the information was in my head.

Home education is not about ticking boxes, doing the workload; home education is really about learning. We surely had a big steep learning curve to go through at the beginning.

When I was 10, my grandfather - who lived just across the street - had a small business, he was selling timber, garden sheds and garden fencing and so on; and I got involved in the business. It was really small, like a back garden family business, and I was delighted to be involved. I learnt to keep the accounts, receiving clients phone calls. It was a great occasion to gain an insight into business and just the sort of education that you don't get in school. My grandfather died a few years back and now the business is mine, I am keeping it going. I am really grateful I got this opportunity.



Photo by Aleksandar Radovanovic on Unsplash



Growing up Homeschooler: Séamus O'ng

In my teenage years, I got more interested in school work, since most of my GAA friends were doing their Junior Cert and I felt I wanted to be part of that. For Irish I had a tutor, but for history and geography I mainly just self educated. I would probably have found school very hard, because I had no motivation to do the regular school work.

My interest moved to music when I grew up. Irish traditional music became my focus; my sister started playing the fiddle and when I was 14 my main interest was the uilleann pipes - I absolutely loved it and still do, I still practice 3 hours a day. I really want to make a living out of music. I was given the opportunity to perform at a local radio and I was given a scholarship to attend the Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy, which is a week long school in traditional music and I loved it. If it weren't for home education, I would not have been able to dedicate so much time to this and I feel really lucky for this.

I feel home education is about finding your own interest and harness it, giving it your full attention; in school you don't get to do that. Realistically is all about doing what you want to do, invest time in that.

Thanks to the music, I started my radio show on a local radio station and this started making me interested in the media side of things - something else that simply opened my options.

Socially, I think it is important to get involved with the home educating community and meet up with other people; otherwise it can be easy to feel sort of closed up and you can get lonely. My mum was brilliant; she would drive to other meet ups, and she would organise a lot of meet ups locally. She would organise the meet ups around something we would be interested about, so that I could meet other home educated children who shared my own passions and interests. So for example, at the beginning she would organise sports meet ups, since I was interested in sports. If you are

starting your home education journey, do get involved; there are several organisations, nationally and locally, HEN but also the Catholic Home Schooling group, so do look out.

Till recently, I was not really sure what I wanted to do with myself. Then one day, my auntie called me, she was helping out a local primary school and doing a traditional Irish music workshop and she asked if I wanted to help her out, bringing my uilleann pipes. I had worked with small children at the GAA and I was intrigued, so I went. I played and I explained a bit about the uilleann pipes and... well, it went so well, that I think I would be actually interested in bringing my approach to primary school teaching! I discovered you need points to start studying to become a primary teacher and that kind of burst my bubble. Thankfully, I found out that at a local college (Ballyfermot College of Further Education) there is a 3 years course in traditional Irish music and media, which combines nicely my interests and, upon completion, would give the points to access a Master in Primary Teaching.

So I had to do the Leaving Cert; I started last September. It has been a very tough experience, but even though I never did much school work, I just pushed myself. I am still waiting on my results, but I felt I did really well. I was a bit anxious, because, when someone asked me, I couldn't really say what I had done before for English and Maths for example, but I definitely proved myself that I am able to do school work.





However, even though I did the Leaving Cert and I am happy I was able to do it, I feel the exam is still quite focused on cramming information into your head and throw it out on the paper. It is probably quite as far as you can get from home education. In any case, you don't actually need it, unless you have in mind a career in Medicine, Law, Engineering or Teaching; PLC courses are probably more in line with home education.

Right now, my plan is to become a professional musician, gig and perform with the uilleann pipes, doing traditional Irish music; further down the line, when I settle down, maybe have a family, I would like to become a Primary School teacher.

So, overall, just bear in mind that home education is like a journey, you will get hills and valleys, but you will have more good days than bad ones. My home education journey has been great. The sky is the limit, truly!

Séamus Ong

The above was transcribed from the video is available on Monica O'Connor's You tube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqeMJ-3wdjY>





Homeschooling in France

Editor's note: Macron is currently proposing to make home education illegal in France from September 2021. You can sign a petition to oppose this [here](https://www.mesopinions.com/petition/enfants/instruction-obligatoire-ecole-2021/107379) <https://www.mesopinions.com/petition/enfants/instruction-obligatoire-ecole-2021/107379>

Home education in France has been legal since December 1998; annual registration is compulsory though. A declaration must be made each year at the Mairie of the place of residence and at the School Inspectorate (Inspecteur D'Académie or Rectorat). For home educated children between the age of 6 and sixteen, an annual visit will be made by the School Inspector (Inspecteur D'Académie) and at a minimum every two years by the Mairie. In the event of a change of address, a declaration must be made at the Mairie of the place of residence within eight days of the move.



For the Mayor's visit, parents/guardians are notified in advance; this is a quick visit primarily to check that the living conditions are acceptable, rather than to monitor the children's education.

On the other hand, the Inspection Académique will expect to see the child either at their own offices or in your home once or twice yearly to meet up and discuss how you are educating the child and talk to the child him/herself with a guardian present. This is recent development - previously twice yearly tests were carried out which measured the child's development (as opposed to a comparison to a school child), with a focus on written French and maths.

Regardless of the age of the child, parents/guardians are asked to take a sample of the child's written work (this can be printed out from a computer if they tend to type rather than write). The Inspection Académique varies though, depending on the age of the child and whether they would be at junior school (Ecole primaire, up to 11 years old) or Secondary school (Collège, 11 - 16 years).

For children under 11 there is an informal meeting with both the child and one or both parents/guardians with the Département de l'Éducation Nationale. The meeting is about half an hour long and the teacher might ask the child a few questions, but in our experience there's no written work from the child required during the meetings, other than providing previous work.

For older children the Inspection Académique is at a local school, rather than the Département de l'Éducation Nationale and they will meet 4 different teachers for half an hour each and do a more formal assessment.



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While you are free to teach your children in any way you like, children must master the seven key competences of the common foundation of competence at the end of the legal obligation (age 16). The subjects that must be covered are :

- Written and spoken French
- Maths/basic sciences and technology
- At least one foreign language
- French, European and World History and Geography & Art
- Computer science
- Social and civic competences
- Initiative and autonomy

The children must demonstrate that they can :

- Ask questions
- Make deductions from their own observations and documents
- Be able to reason
- Generate ideas, be creative and produce finished work
- Use computers
- Use resources sensibly
- Evaluate risks
- Communicate with the public

At the end of the 4 evaluations you'll receive a report card with each of the teachers' comments.

In the event of two unsatisfactory inspections, the parents can be ordered to send the child to school.

Photo by Sebastian Mantel on Unsplash





A Chat with... Shyamala

The Joy of a Mindful Life

My name is Shyamala, but nobody calls me that anymore, it is always Shyami - short and sweet. I have two minions (or mini me) A boy, Abhinav who turns 13 in July and a girl, Anoushka who just turned 11.

Everything started when a friend of mine, more like a sister, talked to me about homeschool long before I had kids and I absolutely loved that thought. But life had other plans for me. In 2010 when the recession hit, we moved to India to spend time with the family and I ran into a few family issues there, so I thought it would be best to put them in a school. My son went to school in India for 3 years and my daughter for a year. Well, let's say that I was wrong, that was not a great decision. Yet, that solves one problem, my kids are never going to ask to go to school ever again!

When in 2013 we were planning to move to the US from India I decided to pull my kids out of school. We didn't move to LA as a family but the kids stayed from school forever. I knew the time was just right and I was in a better place to deal with all the adversities that I had to face. My daughter wasn't happy with school and was very clear about that. My son never mentioned it but the minute I spoke about homeschool I could see the change in him and that was it. Nothing could stop me after that.

I am the primary "teacher" because my husband's job is hectic and he travels quite a bit. But he does spend time discussing different subjects, doing crosswords, playing word games and sudoko or taking them on trips around the world.

We have always followed unschooling because I feel kids learn more when I don't stick to a curriculum. My son loves airplanes and my daughter though she loves airplanes she can be an expert on art and computer programming too. Following a curriculum

would have meant that we would have less time to do what they want. The children go to scouts and also do other stuff like climbing and gymnastics. They do spend a lot of time reading and the library is our 'happy' space after home. We don't 'teach' per se but we all are on this learning journey together. I have learnt so much in the past few years compared to my own schooling years.



Photo by Mael BALLAND on Unsplash

Our days are relaxed. We wake up when we feel like. I like the kids the have had their full night's sleep (except when we are catching the red eye flight). Once up they shower and sit down for breakfast. The rest of the day pans out based on what we have planned for the day. It could be just lazing around and reading something, watching YouTube videos, or meeting friends in the park, going to the library or going for a hike with the Home Ed group. We really do not have any schedule. We have loads to eat in between, have fun chatting about different books and characters, playing minecraft and it might be anywhere after 10 pm by the time we get into bed and then the



the chatting continues till everyone is ready to sleep and move to their own spaces.

We live in Dublin 15 close to the Meath border. I have a very supportive community. We do a lot of things with the community and my kids have always been welcome to join the group even when the rest of the children are at school.

My children say home education is better than school, but they do feel sorry for the kids stuck in school when we are heading out to enjoy a hike, climbing or just a drive to the library. The flexibility and the possibility of doing things at our own pace and time is probably the biggest thing that we love.

I have so many great memories. I remember this one time when we walked into a music school when my kids were something like 6 & 4 I think and my son looked at a musical instrument, recognised it and shouted out loud in excitement. There was a drums class going on in one corner, the teacher stopped the class, walked up to us and asked which school my children were going to. When I said they were homeschooled he said "I am not surprised, not one person has identified this musical instrument correctly so far and if a child can do it then you must be doing something different". Or another time, when we were transiting in Dubai. I was talking to the staff at the gate as I was worried about the meal options (my son has allergies) and my teeny weeny 6 year old was busy talking to his 4 year old sister about the aircraft parked at the gate. The staff just stopped talking to me and started listening to what the kids had to say. Such a proud homeschooling moment for me.

In time, we have faced questions from the family (to call it questions is an understatement) The question of what will the children do when they have to pick up a subject for college education comes up every now and then. But there is nothing that I am uncomfortable about or dislike about homeschooling. I'd say I am yet to come across a challenge big enough to scare me. I am sure we made the right decision, I renew this every when I get cuddles from my children, no matter what time

of the day it is. Also the fact that I have a nearly teenager son and have none of the teenage troubles. I feel the fact that we are around for him whenever he wants a cuddle or a chat and yet give him the space he needs when he needs it sorts a lot of 'teenage' issues. This could not happen, were we not home educating.

As a homeschooling mom, I wish I was homeschooled! On a serious note though, I love being this mom who is totally flexible and the fact that we could wake up at any time we want and look out of the window and decide whether we want to dance in the rain or go for a hike or just laze around without rushing ourselves into things that others expect us to do. The joy of having an absolutely mindful life is what is important to me at the end of the day.

I am happy that we have had this beautiful journey so far the way we did. We lived in India, Italy and Ireland. We travelled, we struggled, we had fun and laughed and we cried but each moment taught us something new and I wouldn't change any of it.

This journey like every other journey has its ups and downs. But once you set your mind to it, like everything else it becomes easy to deal with. There is always a support system. If you need help, just ask. Talk, meet people who think like you, talk to people who think differently too. It helps you grow as a person. There is a goal in life but you are not running a race with others and we all have our own homeschooling journeys to look back on.

What does inspire you during difficult times?
My children! Their laughter, the fun they have, their chilled out nature. Especially the maturity of my daughter and the way my children handle things with empathy. This has been my inspiration.

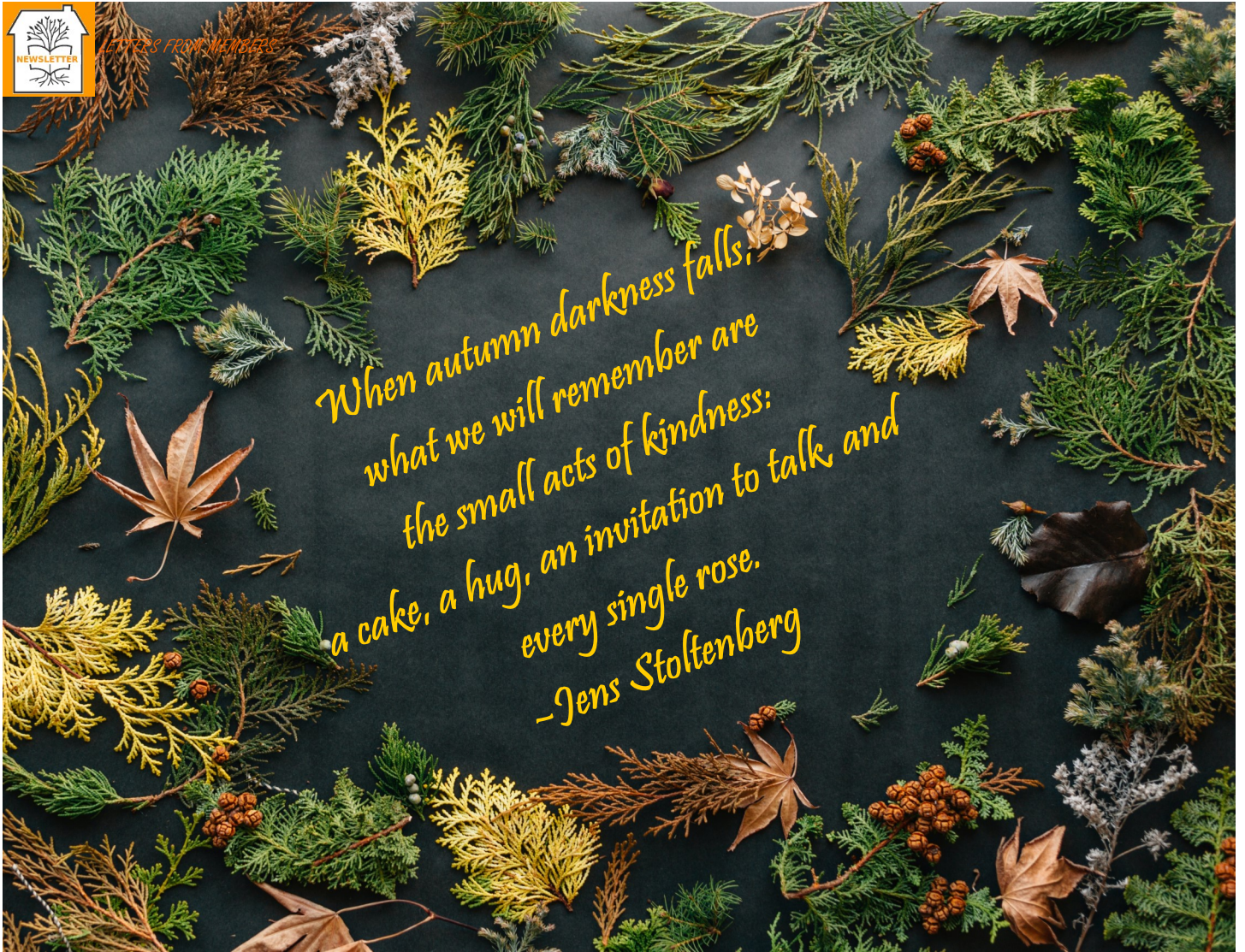


Almost everybody knows that colouring is NOT only children's business. These pages are for YOU! But you can choose, of course, to turn them into a collaborative work of art.





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*When autumn darkness falls,
what we will remember are
the small acts of kindness:
a cake, a hug, an invitation to talk, and
every single rose.
-Jens Stoltenberg*

Photo by Erol Ahmed on Unsplash

Funny sentences you hear in this house...

"I have two enemies that are plants. One is nettles and the other is the spiky stuff."

Me: How do you know you don't like it if you haven't tried it?

Daughter: "The thing is, I have different tastes. One taste is with my eyes and the other is with my mouth."

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,, Derry, Donegal, Down, Dublin North, Fermanagh, Kilkenny, Louth 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



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