

ALTA NEWS



A record 146 tutors came to the June tutor meeting for an excellent talk on dyslexia by Chairman of the Dyslexia Association of T&T, Cathryn Kelshall (extreme right).



Chairs filled up quickly, so tutors got comfortable and floor cushions.



ADULT LITERACY TUTORS ASSOCIATION
OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

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BELMONT 624-2582/3442 84 Belmont Circular Road	Mon-Thurs Fri	9am-5pm 8am-4pm	altapos@alta-tt.org
SAN FERNANDO 653-4656 St Paul's Anglican Church Hall, 3rd Floor, 12 Harris Promenade <i>Marilyn Rampersad</i>	Tues/Wed Fri	10am-2pm	altasfd@alta-tt.org
ARIMA 664-2582 Arima Terminal Mall <i>Alana Lynch-Gomez</i>	Tues Thurs/Fri	9am-5pm	altaarima@alta-tt.org

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START OF NEW ACADEMIC YEAR

ALTA had the usual hectic start to the academic year with our literacy awareness campaign resulting in numerous calls and drop-ins at our offices.

Although this year registration of new students at libraries was lower than last year, students continued to call and come in to venues once the classes had started. Since many ALTA venues are now well established, some students are choosing to go directly to the class rather than register at the library.

For most new students though, the libraries continue to provide the vital link to ALTA. Thanks again to the libraries - ALTA's long-standing partner.

New students, continuing and returning students brought our mid-October total in free community classes to **1,320**. With 275 active volunteer tutors that gives a healthy overall student-teacher ratio of 5:1. Students fall into levels as follows:



Beginners	127
Level 1	444
Level 2	597
Level 3	152

Overall there are some 200 fewer students than at the same time last year, with totals being comparable to 2005. It is worth noting that the reduced numbers are almost entirely at Beginner and Level 1, perhaps indicating that ALTA's 15-year effort has reached many Beginners and Level 1's interested in improving their literacy.

A clear trend this year was that classes in Port of Spain and environs filled beyond capacity so we had to reassign tutors to NALIS, Woodbrook, Belmont and Barataria. On the other hand, classes in the East-West corridor remained small. Many of the students in the POS classes live in the East, but they say the increased traffic from their POS workplaces makes them late for a 5:00pm start at Curepe, Tunapuna or Arima. This is a major change since 2002 when the largest student numbers were along the East-West Corridor.

For the first time, we were able to start a Beginner class in Couva. We have always had one or two Beginner students who had to be referred to the Chaguanas Beginner class, though the traveling was difficult for them. We finally have a match of enough students and excellent Beginner tutors.

Unfortunately, there were not enough tutors to continue the morning class at Pt. Fortin Public Library so the only current option in Pt. Fortin is the afternoon class at Egypt Village. St. Helena Library and the new venues proposed at Cedros and Maloney (our third attempt) failed to attract enough students.

LITERACY AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

ALTA students and tutors once again gave great testimonies in interviews on both TV and radio - CNC 3, NCC TV, TV6, Synergy, IETV, Gayelle, WIN TV, Radio Trinbago, Heritage, 98.1 Isaac The Promise, 102, Heartbeat 103 WACK 90.1 and 91.1 fm. Thanks to tutors Jennifer Pierre, Maureen Baldeo, Brenda De Silva, Janice Ferreira and Hetty Sarjeant.



Four male students, two of whom were beginners, braved the spotlight and spoke very well. One beginner, Noel Benjamin, deserves special mention for unhesitatingly saying 'yes' to last minute interviews and rescheduling his work day to suit. Extra thanks also to Level 3 graduate Lovena Gokool, who was always willing to speak about her ALTA experience and did this so expertly (and well-dressed) that she was mistaken by some for a tutor!

We had hoped to get more features in the press, particularly since we stressed that this year was our 15th Anniversary. The Guardian did publish a very good interview with a female student, Gerald D'Abreau, and the Express had an article on ALTA with quotes from a male student.

On August 27, the Express ran an editorial headlined '15 Years of Crucial ALTA Crusade'. This stated: "Reading and simple comprehension is the lifeblood at the heart of an individual's sense of self-esteem... The volunteers and programme operators of ALTA need all the praise and support they can get. The society owes them a huge debt of gratitude. Above this though, those corporate citizens who support the programme must also be commended and encouraged to stay the course. Others should feel a duty to join this crusade. But the Ministry of Education must shake itself out of its slumber of indifference... into action and partnership with this programme."

This year we increased the number of areas covered by loud-speaker announcements and did not run as many newspaper ads. Thanks to ALGICO, Beacon, Powergen and T&TEC for sponsoring ads and to those who put up flyers and gave out information concerning the classes.



**MEETING
for all class
coordinators
Nov. 24th
9am
Belmont**

Thanks to all who helped with student registration at the libraries, especially our library coordinators who return every year to their chosen library. Because of the relocating of the Chaguanas library, we were not allowed to register students later than 4 pm. Special thanks to the Central tutors who sat on the steps of the mall from 4 - 6 pm on both days registering students. That's commitment for you!



TRICKY TERM DATES

Each ALTA Workbook requires 12 teaching weeks for 24 lessons, so the long first term and very short second term of this school year pose a problem.

- ◆ Term 1: 3 Sep - 14 Dec (15wks/14 for ALTA as we start 1wk later)
- ◆ Term 2: 7 Jan - 21 Mar (11 wks with 1 wk lost to Carnival)
- ◆ Term 3: 7 Apr - 4 July (13 wks)

For most classes the Dec 14th close of term is too near to Christmas to expect regular attendance. Once December starts, many students have to work late and this is compounded by transport difficulties and Christmas tasks. ALTA recommends:

- ◆ Unless your students agree to buy and begin Bk 2 (Bk 5 for Lev. 3) at the start of December, we suggest you close the week ending 7th Dec. The last class day is of course reserved for the Christmas party.
- ◆ If you do not do 3-4 lessons of Bk 2 in Term 1, tutors and students must plan to add extra class days (at least 3) or an extra hour on to 6 lessons. Also plan make-ups for public holidays falling on class days.
- ◆ It is NOT an option to leave out all the Feedback and Practice lessons or ask students to do four writing lessons at home.

READING CIRCLE

Arima Boys RC School	Wed. 5.00 to 7.00pm
Chaguanas Community Centre	Tues. 4.00 to 6.00pm
Curepe Holy Saviour AC School	Thurs. 5.00 to 7.00pm
Naparima Girls High School, San F'do	Tues. & Wed. 4.30 to 6.30pm
Point Fortin AC School	Tues. 4.00 to 5.00pm
POS: National Library	Tues. 4.00 to 6.00pm
ALTA Office, Belmont	Mon. & Wed. 4.00 to 6.30pm
St. James Library	Fri. 9.00 to 11.00am
Princes Town Library	Mon. 4.30 to 5.30pm
Siparia Boys RC School	Thurs. 5.30 to 7.00pm

Paula conducted a training session for Reading Circle guides on Saturday 6th October which 24 trained and untrained tutors attended. Further sessions will be offered so try to recruit more guides to provide the much-needed support for our students. Email or call Marilyn at the South Office.

ALTA Reading Circles are now more structured with more guides, so really encourage students to make use of this personalised, free reading practice.

CALL FOR NEW ALTA TUTORS

Every year, 100 plus new volunteer tutors are trained after Easter. Interviews for prospective tutors are in progress, continuing until February 2008. Those who have the required time and literacy level then observe 8 ALTA classes before they are considered for training.

If you know anyone who is interested in becoming an ALTA volunteer, please ask them to call the relevant office to make an appointment for an interview at Belmont (Tues), Arima (Thurs) or San Fernando (Fri).

NEW POLICY ON MEMBERSHIP

The ALTA Board has decided that membership in ALTA will be restricted to certified tutors only. The following clause has been added to the contract signed by applicants selected for the ALTA Tutor Training Course:

- 8.1 Once the Tutor has successfully completed both components of the training, ALTA shall supply the Tutor with a graded certificate and may invite the Tutor to become a member of ALTA.

This means tutors in the first year of teaching do not pay membership dues.

NEW FACES & FACES IN NEW PLACES

Workplace and Arima Manager, Arlene Wallace-Romero, is pursuing a Cambridge University Masters degree through UTT over the next year. She continues to coordinate ALTA classes and thankfully ends every email with 'keep in touch', as ALTA without Arlene is inconceivable! Alana Lynch-Gomez will continue to staff the Arima Office.

In Arlene's absence we welcome Maureen Baldeo, tutor and former board member, as our Workplace Manager. Call her at Belmont if interested in contract ALTA teaching as she has been getting lots of calls!

In the North, we welcome Isha O'Brien as our new data entry clerk, replacing Laurel O'Neil. In the South, we say a sad goodbye to coordinator, Natasha Johnson, who will be migrating to the US in early November. Her loss will be felt as she is so good with both students and tutors, ensuring that all are satisfied.



STUDENT GLASSES

By the end of Term 1, submit completed green form for students with vision problems. Free eye test appointments Jan-Easter 2008.



NEW LOOK SOUTH OFFICE

The south office has new carpets (donated by bpTT), new matching green paint on the walls, new kettle and tea supplies (all donated by tutor Sharada Hosein), new notice board - thanks to a group of faithful South tutors.

Natasha Johnson, Myrna Jones and Olive Brizan assisted with the laying of carpet and redecorating. Natasha's husband, Anim, did the painting and helped with other work. We say a sincere thank you to him. The team stayed until 9pm to finish the painting. All this in addition to volunteering with ALTA. There are many good people in this world!

15th ANNIVERSARY ALTA T-SHIRTS

We have a large stock of T-Shirts in a variety of colours and sizes - a chance for early, hassle-free Christmas shopping!

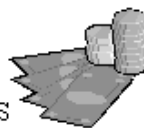
Since many tutors expressed a preference for polos, we have ordered sleeveless polos, ladies polos with sleeves and men's polos. The ladies polos with sleeves are quite small fitting (even XXL) so tutors may prefer to take a size S Men's polo. Please note that XL scooped-neck fitted jerseys and XL sleeveless polos were NOT available.

TSTT WALK FOR LITERACY

TSTT has planned a Walk for Literacy and invited ALTA to be part of this. **Sat. 8th Dec 7-8am:** Walk around the Savannah finishing at TSTT carpark, 109 St Vincent Street. **From 9am:** Readings by Eintou Springer; presentation by Arts in Action; displays by book stores, ALTA and other agencies.

Registration (includes T-shirt & gift bag): Adult \$30 Child under 12 \$20

DONATIONS RECEIVED & REQUIRED



Received:

- ◆ BG Energy Fund (through FEEL), Scotiabank, RBTT, PCS Nitrogen and Phoenix Park Gas contributed to funding specific projects.
- ◆ TSTT installed high-speed internet at Belmont free of charge and granted ALTA residential rather than corporate rates - a big dollar difference!
- ◆ TTPost donated 2,000 pre-paid envelopes.

Required:

- ◆ Computers - ALTA has not bought a new computer since 2000 and our aged machines are on the verge of expiring
- ◆ Renovations to and repainting of Belmont office
- ◆ New ALTA sign & banner

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Prison Programme Two years after our proposal was submitted, funding was received in August from the Ministry of National Security to resume the prison programme. ALTA had halted supplies of ALTA materials to prisons from April, but we are now back in prison.

bpTT Mayaro Literacy Improvement Project Now in its third year, this project has been streamlined to make maximum use of scarce tutor resources. From July 9 to Aug. 24, 2007, seven tutors delivered an intense daily ALTA programme across 4 levels at the Mayaro Resource Centre. The programme was attended by 42 students, both from schools and the community. A new and welcome feature was bpTT's provision of bus tickets for Guaya students. The maxis for Kernahan students were continued and worked well.

ALTA classes resumed at 3 venues for this academic year. The ALTA class at Kernahan Pentecostal Church (Mayaro) has been closed due to venue problems and absent students during the harvest season in Term 2. Since this worked well in the July-Aug programme, bpTT provides transport for Kernahan students to the ALTA class at Mayaro Resource Centre.

Experienced ALTA tutors deliver the ALTA Programme to students at Mayaro Comp., Guaya High and Servol Mayaro JLC.



TEACHING MATERIALS

Level 3 A Programme Marise Warner and Paula Lucie-Smith are working on a major revision of the first Level 3 programme so that it better matches the new B programme. It is now being piloted in three classes.

Bk 1, Level 2 A Programme has been updated to include Hurricane Ivan in the hurricane lesson.

T&T LITERACY RATE NOT OVER 90%

GUARDIAN *Thurs Sep 13, 2007 Letters to the Editor*

I refer to the article reporting on the Moms for Literacy conference, pg 38 Saturday Guardian, Sept 8. Paragraph 4 states: "The latest statistics in 2005 quoted by the Adult Literacy Tutors Association indicate that T&T has a literacy rate of 95%."

This is inaccurate on two counts. First, there are no valid 'latest statistics in 2005' for literacy in T&T as only a survey can give accurate data on literacy. The only National Literacy Surveys in T&T were done by ALTA (1994) and UWI (1995), which showed that just 45% of the adult population could read and understand a newspaper article, such as this letter. The surveys



agreed that 22-23% of the adult population could read and write so little that it hinders their everyday activities (180,000 people).

Secondly, the Adult Literacy Tutors Association (ALTA) has never given any credibility to statistics claiming a 95% literacy rate in T&T. Indeed, for 15 years we have been saying the opposite! We have taken every opportunity to refute the oft-quoted, false claim that T&T's literacy rate is over 90%.



The Literacy Awareness Conference seems to accept the literacy rate of 98% given in the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) 2005 data on T&T. Where do UNESCO statistics come from? The footnote to the UIS report gives this as national censuses or surveys.

For T&T, the two literacy surveys have never been reflected in UNESCO statistics, even though the UWI survey conducted by the Institute of Social and Economic Research was part-funded by UNESCO. The UN Human Development Report admits that the 'Human Development Report Office is primarily a user, not a producer, of statistics.' Clearly, there is no difference between UNESCO and TT Government stats on literacy, and it is open to question whether the government is interested in accurate literacy statistics.

Interestingly, the 2005 Human Development Report warns, 'Because definitions and data collection methods vary across countries, literacy estimates should be used with caution. The UIS...is actively pursuing an alternative methodology for measuring literacy, the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP).'

Currently, the T&T literacy rate is merely a reflection of the ratio of the primary-age population who are in school, the assumption being that schooling equates literacy. A look at SEA results should be all you need to negate this. If not, consider that almost all students at ALTA's classes have attended primary school, and some have gone all the way through secondary school.

The 1994 & 95 National Literacy Surveys stand as the only true picture of literacy in T&T. Although they were conducted over a decade ago, it is unlikely that a new survey would reveal much change, and any change may in fact be negative. Perhaps UWI may want to update their survey. With no government funding, ALTA's funds are directed to addressing literacy needs, rather than documenting them.

In any case, the exact literacy rate is unimportant. What is important is first, to make literacy a priority in schools and all community projects; second, to implement effective literacy programmes in both.



ALTA is an effective literacy programme for both teens and adults. If you know someone who can't read this letter, encourage them to call 624 ALTA.

Paula Lucie-Smith, ALTA Founder/CEO