

“IN the classroom, I wasn’t paying attention and I got left behind. Everything went too quickly for me and no-one explained anything to me. They were different times, and the education system is different now so I’m not going to hold it against them that things were different then.”

Over coffee, Kenneth White is sharing the story of his battle with literacy problems. Kenneth is a recent graduate of Respond! College’s twelve-month certificate course on Care of the Older Person, and had got employment in his new field even before he graduated, but the journey to education was a long one.

Now aged 44, he left school at 16.

“I was young and naïve and I just wanted to be out in the world working,” he says. “I got a job; there was 11 in the family and any money I earned I handed up to my mam at home. I didn’t have problems at home or anything like that; we got on great as a family.”

His brother got him a job with Acme Blinds as a blind-maker after school, and throughout his 20s and early 30s, he worked in various manual jobs on building sites and as a kitchen porter. He had basic literacy skills, but his confidence was poor and it affected his employment prospects.

“I’d panic if I saw a form,” he says. “Even if you do manage to get an interview, you’re going into it panicking.”

Then, the hard times hit and work became scarcer; Kenneth was unemployed for a total of nearly five years.

“About eight years ago I decided, ‘Wow, I really need to do better than this.’” he says.

He took the step of approaching the Write Together Adult Literacy Scheme in Churchfield: “Sarah Byrne was my tutor and they were very good to me. It was a big step to be taking in my life, as an adult, but they were very welcoming and really made me feel at home.

“To walk in off the street and go in and tell a person these problems is a really big step,” he says. “I want to say, to anyone with literacy problems, to just take that step; education is everything. I’d never looked for any help and I didn’t even know it was there until I went looking for it.”

Kenneth did five years of classes in Churchfield and then applied for a Community Employment (CE) Scheme.

“Eventually I got a job through the CE scheme as a caretaker at the YMCA on Marlboro Street. Jack Dixon was the manager there and he was very good to me,” he says.

But all good things must end and at the end of the scheme, Kenneth was again worried for the future. At a meeting with his CE co-ordinator, he heard about Respond! College, which offers a range of academic programmes and professional training courses on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and is a not-for-profit college run as part of Respond! Housing Association, a national organisation based in Dublin, with outreach centres in Cork, Galway, Waterford and Laois.

“Since that day I never looked back,” Kenneth says.

“I got my diploma and the graduation was the proudest moment of my life. I kept thinking about all the people who helped me along the way; without them none of this would have been possible.

“My confidence and self-esteem have grown. At the graduation I even got up to speak; I never would have done that before. I feel so proud of myself, I feel happy and I feel like I have a lot to give.”

Being back in education for a 12 month course wasn’t easy for Kenneth but the small class sizes, informal atmosphere and supportive environment made the course manageable.

“This was a new experience for me and I found it very hard,” he says. “It was a great experience but it was a daunting task. We’d all

A new world has opened up

Having left school aged 16, Kenneth White, of North Cathedral tells ELLIE O’BYRNE about being unemployed for five years, after the recession hit and how he turned his life around thanks to the Write Together Adult Literacy Scheme in Churchfield and Respond College!



A PROUD MOMENT: Registrar and Head of Education Dr Deborah Butler, graduate Kenneth White and Respond! College Course Coordinator, Kevin O’Farrell.

help one another and work in groups of four and six, and that was a big help. We’re all friends now and we’re going to meet up once a month.”

Lasting friendship was just one aspect of the course that enriched Kenneth’s life; halfway through his course, he applied for and got a job with Home Instead Senior Care, a company that provides caregivers for elderly people in their homes.

Kenneth, who lives in North Cathedral, currently provides care for five clients on the Northside, and loves his job.

“You’re dedicating your life to taking care of other human beings,” he says. Coming from such a large family, Kenneth says he was al-

ways a caring person growing up anyway, but that now he knows his future lies in caregiving.

“I love the job and I’m passionate about it; helping a person less fortunate than myself really makes me feel like I’m doing some good in my life. It’s really special to get to know them, and their families,” he says.

Following his graduation, Kenneth feels that the sky is the limit and he’s planning on furthering his education in the same field, the better to do the work he now believes he was always supposed to be doing.

“None of us ever knows when we’re going to need help. This has opened a whole new world for me and shown me how vulnerable people are and how dependent on help we can all be.”

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Pleasures and talent abundant in Everyman’s summer show, Factory Girls

A SPIRITED production with a comically talented ensemble make The Factory Girls, at the Everyman, an enjoyable summer show for the Everyman, writes Liam Heylin.

Frank McGuinness’s first play concerns a group of women in a Donegal shirt factory who face the demoralising realities of their work and home lives with a defiant stand where sisters decide it’s time to get going it for themselves.

It is not hard to see the attraction of the play for the theatre company’s artistic director Julie Kelleher or for that matter the appeal the work has for the audience as it contains plenty of the comradery in the face of adversity of film and stage shows like Made in Dagenaham, Kinky Boots and Calendar Girls. That said, there is plenty of grit and cantankerous rowing as McGuinness’s girls gamely tear the faces off each other, figuratively if not literally.

In broad terms it was a good call to give the play a lively Cork accent even if the characters were left to get their mouths

around the anachronism of referring to children as ‘wee-uns’, one of the words which didn’t travel well from Donegal to Cork. To get the quibbles out of the way it is fair enough that the script chooses to leave matters somewhat unresolved at the end but even the hugely appreciative audience last night was left wondering if it was over when it was over and perhaps there could be some tweaking to bring it to a stronger close.

The pleasures are many and the talent abundant not least from Fionula Linehan who turns in a performance of feistiness and humour as she lets rip both with righteousness and barbed comments. Antoinette Hilliard brings a depth of sympathy and quirkiness to the older factory girl. (We are reminded that they are not women but girls because nobody grows old on the factory floor). In a lively ensemble George Hanover also has a sure touch. Olan Wrynn’s design is economical and evocative.

Julie Kelleher directs the piece with a sweeping musicality that is tuned to pathos but zinging with keen comic timing.



TALENTED: Antoinette Hilliard, Fionula Linehan, George Hanover and Aine Ní Laoghaire as The Factory Girls, which runs until July 30.