

Welcome to the education otherwise March Newsletter

(and apologies if it's rather scrappy – I've had a lot of trouble with the technology this month and am running out of time)

CALLING ALL MEMBERS IN THE BIRMINGHAM AREA ...

– WE NEED YOU !

– THIS SATURDAY MORNING

(Sorry for shouting – but this is really important)

In recent years, several AGMs have had to be postponed because a quorum has not been reached by the start of the meeting.

Without a quorum we will be unable to carry out the AGM business, and the special resolutions will have to be postponed. Members who are unable to attend may of course send a proxy, but we need **20 MEMBERS PERSONALLY PRESENT** in order for the AGM to proceed. That's 20 Signed-Up Members – SUMs – but you can become a SUM right up to the start of the meeting.

If you are able to attend to ensure a quorum at the AGM, please do so – AGM business normally takes no more than about half an hour, but we have allowed extra time so that special resolutions can be debated before lunch.

It would be really good if you can stay for the afternoon discussion session also – and the more members the better. More information and directions to venue in EO business section below.

And a reminder to everyone who's ever wondered 'why on earth did they print that in the EO NL?' ...

Apart from official EO business and notices, it has always been the policy for the newsletter to print what members send in (subject to the usual caveats of complying with law, decency, etc.) Therefore in effect the editorial decisions are made by you - EO members - and the co-ordinator's job is simply to bring them together and arrange for production and distribution. We recognise the huge diversity of lifestyles and interests among EO members, therefore we don't feel it would be appropriate for the NL to be selective with regard to content, although we may sometimes suggest alterations to ensure clarity, etc.

In the old paper newsletter, there was always a section for members' letters, and sometimes these expressed a wide variety of opinions. We feel this is healthy and democratic, so as NL co-ordinator I have reinstated a Letters section – please see below, and feel free to contribute.

Anne <arix@educationotherwise.org> [Acting] EO NL Co-ordinator

education otherwise volunteer vacancies

We have had several offers of help, and are in the process of sorting out who would be the best person for each job - that's a job in itself! I've had an offer of technical help with the NL, which should mean the next one is better produced.

But we still need more help, and in particular

SEN contact required to answer telephone calls

Will have experience and knowledge of SEN and disabilities beyond that of their own children, knowledge of the SEN Code of Practice, knowledge of how local authorities, including social care, work and preferably experience or training in telephone counselling.

Please contact jskillen@educationotherwise.org



To Group Organisers:

please remember when giving details of events that the EO newsletter can be read by people who are not EO members. If you would like your group to have a listing or if you have any changes to make to your existing entry you will need to complete and return a permission form.

You can obtain a permission form by sending a stamped self addressed envelope to Education Otherwise Regional Diary, 125 Queen Street Sheffield S1 2DU, by emailing regionaldiary@educationotherwise.org or by downloading one from the [Official EO Forms](#) board of the Business section of Members Forum.

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Penpals - No new penpals this month - but you can still write to earlier ones.

Requesting a Pen Pal

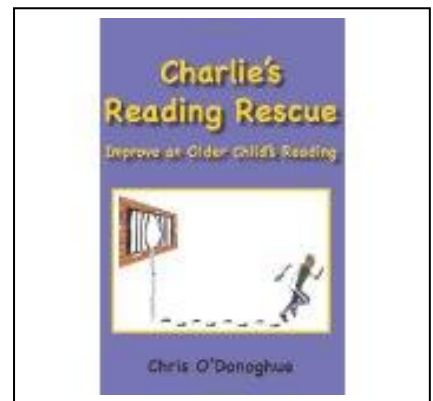
Would you like a home-educated pen-pal? If so, please email penpals@educationotherwise.org or write to EO Penpals, 125 Queen Street, Sheffield, S1 2DU and we will send you a form. You can also download a form through the EO Business Forum, [Official EO Forms](#) topic.

NB - While EO take care to verify that pen-pal correspondents are EO members, it is the responsibility of parents to oversee any replies your children send or receive. Children are reminded that they should consider the feelings of others when writing or responding to letters.

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Book Reviews – Collated by Tammy

Charlie's Reading Rescue
Author: Chris O'Donoghue
ISBN: 978-1-60976-573-6
Price: £6.75



Charlie's Reading Rescue is a fantastic new book aimed at helping parents, tutors and teachers improve the reading skills of older children who are struggling. It is also perfect for helping children who are learning English as their second language.

The author is retired teacher Chris O'Donoghue and he created the programme after being unable to find one to suit the needs of one of his students. The programme is broken down into 10 sections, each one focusing on different letter sounds and word families and increasing in difficulty. Most of the sections start with short stories introducing the sounds and word families. Each story is followed by a word list and a spelling list. The spelling test is a key element to the programme as it helps children to become familiar with a word. The author feels that written rather than verbal spelling tests are best to help students remember and recognize words. This is followed by a word building list to show students how words are built up by adding letters. Next is a short skit for student and teacher to read together. The section is rounded off by a comprehension exercise where students are asked to choose the word that best completes the sentence. Most chapters also have a word search and sentence writing exercise. Each section can be completed a number of days or weeks depending on the skill and confidence of the student. The sections increase in difficulty and the book culminates in a two chapter story.

This book offers a simple, easy to follow method for helping struggling readers. It helps them to build the skills they need to become more confident. It is a fantastic new resource for parents to help their children master the art of reading.

The website: <http://www.charliesreadingrescue.com/> gives more details about the book and allows you to preview some of the chapters.

We have one copy of the book to give away. To enter the prize draw email your name and address to: bookreviews@educationotherwise.org by the 10th of April.

Please put 'Charlie's Reading Rescue' as your subject line.

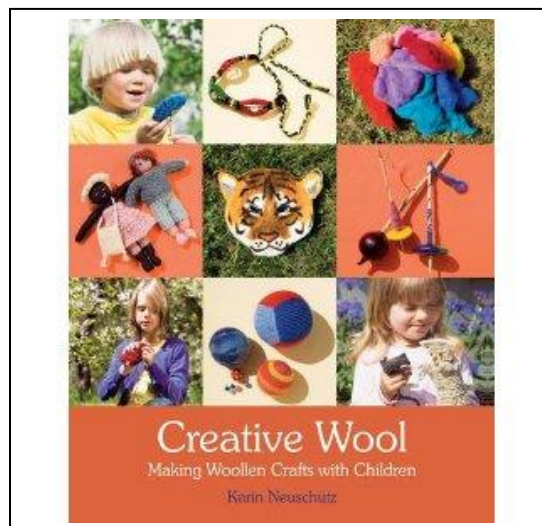
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Creative Wool - Making Woollen Crafts with Children  
Author: Karin Neuschütz  
ISBN:978-086315-800-1  
Price: £12.99

This bright and colourful new book from Floris Books is a welcome addition to your craft bookshelf.

It features projects for parents and children to do together and covers Spinning, Crocheting and Knitting, Braids, Balls, Dolls and Animals.

The instructions for each project are well laid out and easy to follow. There are photographs and diagrams that compliment each activity.



The lovely projects in this book will keep you and your family occupied all spring!  
You can See sample projects from the book in [March NL](#) folder on Members Forum.

We have one copy of Creative Wool to give away. To enter the prize draw email your name and contact details to [bookreviews@educationotherwise.org](mailto:bookreviews@educationotherwise.org). The deadline for entries is April 10th.  
Please put 'Creative Wool' in the subject line.

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## Features & Letters

*Contributors please note that although we do not print your full name and address, this must be supplied.*

### **OLYMPIC IDEAL?**

While appreciating and enjoying as always your latest newsletter, Anne, I feel compelled to ask why you would lead with a piece urging readers to book for the Olympic Games?

Firstly, what have tickets for the Olympics to do with home education?

More urgently I'm concerned about Education Otherwise promoting an organisation which siphons away vast sums of money from society for the benefit of a handful of elite athletes and their multi-national sponsors, particularly when its highest profile 'partners' are MacDonald's and Coca Cola, both hardly good for children.

Despite all the hype promoting the great event, growing numbers of people are questioning the sense in spending precious billions for the sake a few extra medals, and wonder whether money wouldn't better be spent on essential sports facilities for ordinary people across the country.

Far from helping our young people to get out and participate in sport, the Olympics encourage them to watch others perform, preferably while munching a Big Mac and quaffing a can of Coke.

By all means promote World Book Day, but please reconsider our support for the Olympics.

*Jonathan (Home-Ed dad with 3 home-ed children) Herts*

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### **HE FAMILY IN MEXICO**

Home schooling in Mexico is a rare endeavour!

I'm a Mexican mom educating a 13-year-old girl and a 10-year-old boy. Both have special needs that weren't met at school. I can offer help and advise for UK expatriates in Mexico. My children and husband belong to a scouting group, and we can offer information on joining a local scouting group, for people of different beliefs who would be interested.



particularly in the provinces with a smaller population: in the areas up north and in the prairie regions in the centre – basically any location away from the main centres at the Great Lakes and on the west coast (Vancouver). Like everywhere else, the internet becomes an indispensable help, with an incredible amount of chatrooms, forums, e-lists and message boards. In addition, parents have to be prepared to travel even more than in Europe, because this is a country made for the car. But then: Where else can you have a regular camping/canoing/climbing group in the great outdoors?

The provincially organised system makes it difficult to assess statistics for the entire country. Wikipedia states some numbers, e. g. for 1995: 10,000 official and 20,000 unofficial (roughly about 1 percent of school-age children). For some individual states, it has the following figures: 3,068 (British Columbia only, 2005) and 1,500 (Manitoba only, 2006, that is 0.5% of students enrolled in the public system). (source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeschooling>)

Links:

- <http://www.hslda.org/hs/international/> (an American, non-profit organisation with advice, especially on legal matters, as well as contact details for home education organisations and the latest press releases concerning home ed)
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeschooling> (general overview, not too much depths)
- <http://www.flora.org/homeschool-ca/> (a very useful page; lists all the regulations in the provinces in detail as well as some general statements and many links; not always kept up to date)
- <http://www.alternative-learning.org/> (alternatives to schools in general, quite a mixture)

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## **Diary of a Home Educating Nobody – by Ross Mountney**

I was thinking the other day about the wonderful opportunity home education gives kids to get things wrong. Now you may think what's the point in that? But there's huge learning potential in getting things wrong, even if friends with school children find that hard to believe.

Both mine were busy when a friend called. They were sitting at the kitchen table, and actually engaged in activities that looked very studious and educational. The youngest was writing and the eldest was working in her maths course book. It was quiet.

I hasten to add; it was rarely like that in our house.

It wasn't rare to see the children busy – they were always busy at something. But it was rare for them not only to be busy at more academic pursuits, but also to be busy at them quietly.

To an outsider, who has two children in school she has to cajole, bribe and threaten to do their homework every night, the sight of children working away on their own without someone standing over them looked remarkable.

Luckily she didn't come two minutes earlier when there was a fight going on. In fact the current quiet was due to the sulking! But it was nice that they were now busy especially as we followed quite an experiential style of education that didn't always appear very educational even though I knew it was.

This particular day though, I admit to being a teeny-weeny bit smug that my children appeared to be so educationally employed. It certainly looked convincing. It also freed me up to put the kettle on.

Anyway my friend and I were chatting away as I made the coffee. My youngest came over to show me her writing then went off to use the computer. The eldest finished the maths exercise she was doing, then used the answer book to correct her work and find the mistakes in the ones she couldn't do.

That's when my friend stopped believing it was educational.

"What? She's going to look at the answers?" she asked.

"Sure. Why not?"

"Aren't you going to mark it?"

"No," I replied. "It's not my work. Anyway she likes to see what she's done and what difference there is between her workings and the answer book."

"I wouldn't trust mine with the answer book," she said. And I could see she wasn't convinced that mine should be either.

I guess it's probably the way most people think about learning. It's the way in which most of us remember our learning; we do the exercises; someone else marks it. That's how education generally worked.

We used to think like that too. But watching the children and how they learn we think differently about it now.

There are several things to think about;

Firstly, are there really valid reasons why our children should not mark their own work? Apart from adults wanting to remain in charge, that is!

Secondly, I question the value of the type of work that involves one person doing it then handing it over to another to mark it without being involved in the process themselves.

And thirdly, there's a point about whose education is it anyway?

Over the time that the children were Home Educated we moved away from the idea that they do the sums and we do the answers because we didn't find this an effective way of learning. Not about sums or about life.

Basically we've come to understand that getting the answer right isn't where the learning is. It's in doing the sum! (Sums just being a simple example here; the same thing applies to most learning).

Continually doing sums that get ticked correct can't have that much educational value, apart from the value of extra practice. And if someone's getting sums right all of the time do they really need all the practice?

The learning that takes place is in the process of doing of the sum, in tackling the things one doesn't know. Getting sums wrong is a way of recognising where the practice is needed. Getting things wrong is actually a valuable educational experience and should be seen as such.

If you continually set yourself challenging things to do, that you might get wrong, then discover how you can get them right, you're stretching and developing your skills and learning processes. That's where real education lies.

In an environment where getting things wrong has no shame or anxiety attached it can become an enjoyable challenge seeing how to get the right answer. And at times, when we had absolutely no idea of the answer, we even looked at it first! Especially in English where we could discuss a punctuation exercise for example, or how someone lays out a paragraph. Then we have a good debate on whether we agree or not and whether we are going to stick to it for the sake of getting the mark – also an important point.

Children can be trusted to correct work themselves. And because they're not in a competitive environment they understand that the only cheating they can do is to cheat themselves out of learning.

Taking away work and marking it keeps the learner in a position of not being in charge of their own learning. And I believe that when children are able to truly take charge of their own education they also learn another valuable lesson. They learn that not only can they be in charge of their own education; they can be in charge of their own life too. And being in charge of life is a better place to be than at the mercy of it.

We encouraged the children at every opportunity to take charge of what they're doing. That's not to say we didn't help, guide, suggest – and all right then, I admit, made them do certain things. But we tried to show them the reasons behind what we did, encouraged them to see the value of what they do for themselves, gave them responsibility as much as we could.

For we wanted them to feel that their education was for them, not for us. For their sake, not for ours.

Giving them the answer book is just another way of keeping their education theirs. And making them feel empowered.

Some educational approaches make children feel completely powerless. And some adults work at keeping them so. Disempowerment is a habit they can easily adopt for life. Disempowered children can sometimes come to harm. Disempowered lives are seldom happy ones.

We trust that our children begin to understand the value of what they do. We trust they understand that there is no value in just doing maths and ticking answers, especially ones that came directly from an answer book. They understand that it's the working out that's important for their education, and their life, not simply the answers.

We put the answer book in their hands. And we put the power over their education in their hands too. Hoping that from there they'd have power over their own lives. Forever.

You will find lots of help on coping with home educating in my book 'Learning Without School. Home Education' available through EO, Amazon and other major booksellers. And on my weblog:

<http://rossmountney.wordpress.com/>

If you would like me to come and talk to your group about our home education journey, home education in general, and have an opportunity to ask questions and see copies of my book please email me for details [r.mountney@btinternet.com](mailto:r.mountney@btinternet.com)

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## **Starting To Home Educate - by Andrew, Teignbridge EO local contact.**

If you have just withdrawn your child from school to home educate, you may feel at a loss on what to do next, especially if they have just been through a traumatic experience. The following ideas could be of help:

Adapting to another learning world.

Whilst we may be concerned about our son or daughter being able to adapt to another learning world, sometimes it can be ourselves who will struggle the most in adapting to a new way. Jan Hunt states 'today's generation of parents have it the hardest, because they have to trust a process that they themselves never experienced directly'. If your child has been in school, at some point you may have contact with the local education authority. We may think that the LA will expect us to try and copy routines that have been learned from school; however the government's own guidelines to LAs indicate that time should be allowed for development of educational provision, so we all have the time to clear our minds and think about new ways to progress.

Something else which may be unexpected, is the fact that the LA rate socialising your child as important (if not more so) than their education (3.15 of the elective home education guidelines for local authorities). Making use of old social circles whilst also exploring new social opportunities such as: after school groups, home education groups, leisure centres, library/book clubs, play centres, National Trust etc.... will help.

Giving our children the choice to choose what they want to learn is likely to feel strange, especially if we are not familiar to the idea, but learning happens in ways we do not understand; as mentioned on a home schooling ideas website 'learning takes place even when nothing seems to be done'. All of our children are naturally interested or are clever at something. They just need the time and freedom to find their natural skills.

Learning schedules and breaks.

Although it is tempting to try and set learning schedules that suit us, our children may have their own times of the day when they can take information in more readily (see Feb 2011 EO newsletter article 'When Our Children Do Not Want To Learn'). If your original style of home educating does not appear to be working, then a different style can be used. Education Otherwise often explains that 'there are as many home education styles as there are children, because all children are different'. A home education website also states this with 'one of the best features of home learning and teaching is its flexibility'.

When a learning style has been found that suits him or her, care may be needed to stop them from burning themselves out. The need to introduce breaks in creative sessions may be important, to keep the learner from getting tired and going into overdrive. Jan Hunt also mentions 'research shows that more learning takes place when there are rest breaks in the learning activity'.

Socialising opportunities may also need to be monitored, so that an overall healthy balance is achieved and kept progressive.

Conclusion:

Starting to home educate can be complex, for parent and child alike. With patience and a different style of thinking, there may not only be a surprising progression but also a new sense of life for all the family! Sadness and frustration can turn to pride. New friends can be made and holiday time is more flexible. Our children's learning years can be an enjoyable experience!

References:

- Jan Hunt: [http://www.naturalchild.org/jan\\_hunt/ten\\_tips\\_unschooling.html](http://www.naturalchild.org/jan_hunt/ten_tips_unschooling.html)
- Home schooling ideas: <http://www.homeschooling-ideas.com/autonomous-learning.html>
- A home education: <http://www.ahomeeducation.co.uk/home-school-teaching-methods.html>
- Elective HE guidelines for LAs [http://www.home-education.biz/EHE\\_2007.pdf](http://www.home-education.biz/EHE_2007.pdf)

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## **The Development of Education Otherwise – by Gwen Baldock**

Education Otherwise was established in 1977 by a few people sitting around a kitchen table. Over the intervening years, hundreds of wonderful volunteers have stepped forward to assist the many families who joined EO for social opportunities and support. An expanding network of specialist help developed; collective expertise that is at risk if we don't help EO recover from this bad period.

Throughout its history (the last few years being the exception) EO was run by the members for the members. Trustees used to form only a part of the governing of EO. Full participation by members was welcome at the decision-making Council meetings held three times a year, usually attached to a camp or gathering. These open meetings were held dear by those who enjoyed being able to go to any meeting and have their say, and only rarely were issues unresolvable through consensus. But as EO grew it became harder for all members to keep in touch. Plus, this was not a democratic system.

Firstly, in general, there was no formal way to represent all members' opinions – although a wide range of views certainly did find their way into these large (and long!) meetings. Further, attendees (many of whom went on to become trustees) were the main decision makers but inevitably were self-selecting participants. In fairness to this past structure, these people were often local contacts who had become interested in helping at national level, so there was a good degree of indirect membership input. Even so, as EO grew it became less easy for all members to feel connected.

### **A new way forward**

However EO now needs to look to a different future as the steady flow of volunteers to national office has been interrupted by recent events; the finances have taken a serious dive, and the trustees who were elected just a couple of months ago can only manage to gather up, sort and hold on to as many threads as possible for a limited period – hopefully until a new and sustainable way of functioning is established.

So, let's look on this difficult patch as a time of opportunity. A chance to consider a new democratic framework for Education Otherwise. The following is my suggestion of a possible way forward.

In reviving EO, instead of returning to this open approach, I'd love to see the trustee body be made up of EOers who have been democratically elected by members in defined regions of the country. These trustees would be better able to work on behalf of all members, and they would be much more accountable to the membership. The number of trustees EO would require (10 ish?) would be determined by the number of regions plus the need, perhaps, to bring on council other members to act as national Treasurer or General Secretary or whatever additional expertise was necessary.

EO would continue to have individual volunteers and the national secretaries/coordinators as at present; members who undertake the structural and specialist areas of work within EO such as legal support, enquiries, membership, newsletter & publications, special needs/bullying/school anxieties, child protection, exams/college info/styles of learning, LA coordination, campaigns, media work and concessions. The national coordinators would still need to file their reports in to the trustee meetings. In fact it would be important for these experienced people, who are themselves in good contact with others in their specialist fields all over the country, to participate actively whenever possible in the council meetings. But as they are not elected, probably as non-voting participants.

### **Regional development:**

This, to me, is where further really significant development within EO could come about. For some people national events may be too hard, expensive, time consuming or lacking in variety to really benefit from. It is beyond many families to mobilise the children and pay for everyone to stay over somewhere in order to attend a days event, no matter how interesting it might be. Yet in some areas there isn't a lot happening at local level - for many reasons and not always for want of effort. As a result too many EOers don't get the opportunities to develop and share in what could so easily become an amazing selection of social and resource rich opportunities and networks.

If, after full consultation with members, the country were to be divided into regions of a size that most people could comfortably get to in a day, all sorts could happen in these areas. Arrangements could be made for a variety of activities from informal gatherings to more formal conferences with whatever workshops, lectures, activities, resource sharing & development members would like; could initiate, or

help with. Lots of events already take place, but there must be other members, or groups of friends across the country, who'd be happy to offer to organise some kind of event on a one-off basis or even annually. Maybe we'd need a new national post of 'Regional Events Contact'?

This person wouldn't be responsible for running events, but they could keep and advertise a national diary, plus offer ideas to interested parties on what might be done because it's been successful in other areas; or what might need to be considered from insurance to content. Regarding the latter, help could entail encouraging EOers to find enthusiastic people in libraries, local colleges or universities, hospitals, art studios, to share something they are passionate about during an event.

Families would be welcome to attend and contribute to any informal discussion group, gathering, camp or conference, but could only participate in the vote for the trustee in their home region.

I have some ideas as to how this would work in practice, but perhaps the general principle could be raised at the post-AGM consultation session, and also discussed on the Members Forum.

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## EO Business



### AGM REMINDER – Saturday 19th March 2011 at 11.30 am

*Please come along if you live nearby – even if you can only spare the time for the AGM (half to one hour)*

At The Priory Rooms, Quaker Meeting House,  
40 Bull Street, Birmingham, B4 6AF

**Notice of AGM** was circulated last month, but can be accessed via the EO Members Forum [[Feb NL](#)] with text of Special Resolutions and forms for appointment of proxy (deadline 18th March). Also form to become a Signed-Up-Member [[SUM](#)] of EO (at 'Official EO Forms' in EO Business Forum).

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Directions to venue

<http://www.theprioryrooms.co.uk/information/map.pdf>

Travel by Road - Please note only pre-booked organiser and disabled parking is available on site . Delegates should make their way to one of the public car parks indicated on the map above. For information on disabled access, contact The Priory Rooms on Telephone: 0121 236 2317, website: <http://www.theprioryrooms.co.uk/>

Travel by Rail– 40 Bull Street is approx 7 min walk from New Street Station – exit via main ticket barriers & escalator to Palisades Shopping Centre. Turn left to exit Centre via ramp. Continue up Corporation St, passing House of Fraser on left. At the Square Peg turn left past Minories Shopping Arcade. Meeting House driveway is on the right hand side.

Please arrive at 11.00am if possible as the AGM will start promptly at 11.30am.

Lunch (1pm) and drinks will be provided; please let us know numbers attending and if you have any allergies at least 48 hours in advance Contact: Celia McDonagh; 01865 552527, cmcdonagh@educationotherwise.org

2-5pm: Discussion meeting to debate how members see EO moving forwards.

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Local Contact Round Up

Following last month's request, we have had some volunteers come forward, but there are still a number of areas without an official EO Local Contact.

LOCAL CONTACTS provide a vital link for new members, especially those just starting out or considering home education. New home educating families need a welcome to EO and to their local HE community,

information about local activities and who organises them, encouragement to be confident in their ability to home educate in whatever way seems right for them, and non-judgemental listening. It's also valuable if the LC can offer information about deregistration and the usual procedures and policies of their Local Authority, with support in the family's interactions with the LA. Local contacts do need to have some experience of home education.

Please check the Local Contact section of the Forum, and if there is no LC in your area, please consider volunteering to provide this valuable connection.

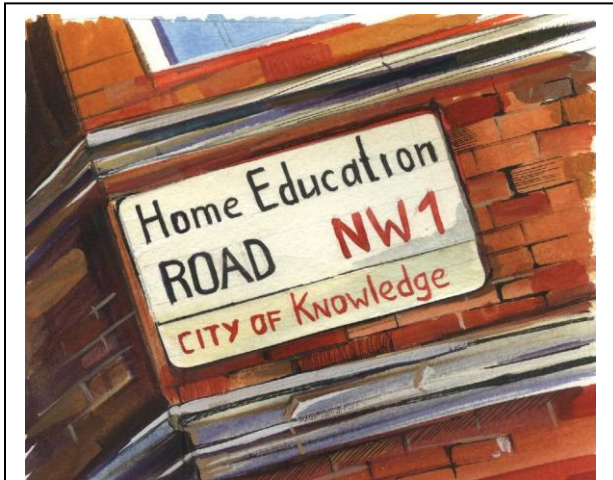
For more information, please contact the LC Co-ordinator, Lei Ashe <lashe@educationotherwise.org>

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ADVERTS IN THE NEWSLETTER

Education Otherwise does not endorse or recommend services or products advertised in this newsletter. Use of tutors remains the responsibility of the parent.

NEC - National Extension College: Making Learning more Interesting. Home study courses in over 20 GCSE & IGCSE subjects; 20 A level subjects including Biology, English & Maths. Up to 20% discount for EO members when paying in full. NEC – the experts in home education Tel. 0800 389 2839 <http://www.nec.ac.uk/>







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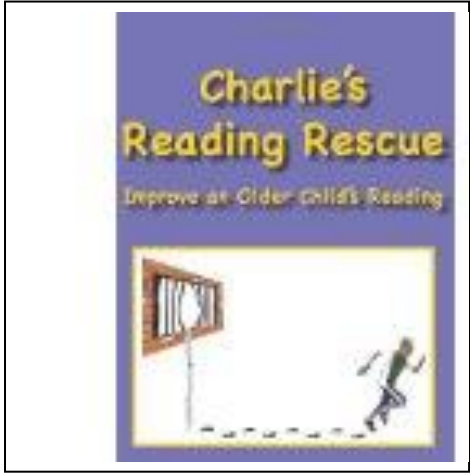
PERIPLUS - Periplus Home Education – online support for all your home education needs. <http://www.periplus.org.uk/>

Tuesday Tutors provides expert one-to-one and group tuition in English and Maths for junior and senior students. London-based, it also offers short courses at local centres. TT is happy to support independent learning and home-centred education. Contact: 07906 312541 / 02077358268 tuesdaytutors@hotmail.co.uk

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Contact:
07906 312541/ 0207735 8268
tuesdaytutors@hotmail.co.uk



I wrote "Charlie's Reading Rescue" when I volunteered to help a bright 10 year old who had a reading age of 5 at the time. It improved Charlie's reading, and his self-esteem, so it might work for a similar child in your care. For details, see <http://www.charliesreadingrescue.com/>

