

Tutors' Reflections

Becoming a Volunteer Tutor opened a new world to me. I am a Senior and past the usual age of gainful employment but I'm still anxious to work at something useful and challenging. [After a short training program at Fraser Valley College, Chilliwack, B.C.], I returned to my small town of Hope in search of students.

The student who cannot read or write English is sometimes hard to contact. He or she is proud and shy and unsure about going back to school, but the local branch of Fraser Valley College lined up some candidates and I was in business...

D. had attended high school, rather intermittently. Now he wanted to register for a welding course but he had not got a Grade Twelve "equivalency." To get this he had to master "the paragraph"...

M., from Honduras, wanted to be able to read and write English. [We started with] the ABC so she could use the telephone book...We used advertisements...because she craved to understand bargains...illustrated cookie recipes [introduced] her to Canadian cooking...

G. [at first was] so deeply shy and [had] such a small vocabulary that it was hard to coax her to communicate...Her real need was to talk.

The fun and fascination of being a Volunteer Tutor is unending. Because each student has his or her own special needs there are no text books to suit every situation, and imagination and ingenuity are essential...One day you may be showing a student how to make correct change for a twenty dollar bill, the next you may find yourself explaining the contour lines on a map, on the next your student may be struggling to explain to you, in English,

how to make "chapattis." Volunteer Tutoring [is a wonderful world] and I'm grateful it opened up for me.

Joan Greenwood, Hope, B.C.

When I volunteered to be a literacy tutor, I expected to do a lot of giving. I wasn't prepared for what my learner would give to me. Heather is a 36-year-old mom on social assistance...one of the many who...go to school, but for whom standard teaching methods are not successful...She has made tremendous progress not only with respect to literacy, but in the realm of personal confidence and independence...on her own, with very little support from those around her... I have taught Heather about reading and writing, but Heather has taught me even more about human dignity and courage...Thank you, Heather.

*Barbara Franck, I-CARE PROGRAM
New Westminister, B.C.*

I will never forget the first time I saw Lena [*not her real name*] read...I was overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task I had undertaken...Lena knew a few words by sight like "sale" and "exit," but she couldn't sound out the words she didn't know...I was terrified. Who was I to think I could teach someone to read and write? I was no teacher; just someone who liked to read and wanted to contribute some time to a worthwhile cause.

Lena was 26 years old, divorced, and living on welfare. She had a five-year-old daughter who was born deaf but had recently been given an operation to restore her hearing. One of Lena's goals was to be able to read her daughter a story... She had quit school in Grade Nine after it became apparent to her that she could not possibly keep up...Listening to Lena talk, I felt my panic subside. She was the one facing the

challenge. All she asked was for me to be there to help her.

Before the end of our first two-hour session Lena was reading three letter words...One short month [later] she came to class with the news that she had read her daughter a story book for the first time... Six months later, Lena still has problems with long, complicated words but she is usually able to break them down and sound them out... Along with her reading skills, her self-confidence has grown enormously. By shaking off the stigma of being illiterate, Lena has found a new feeling of self-worth.

I, too, have gained a lot from our tutoring sessions...Lena has made me aware of [how inability to read and write limits people's possibilities]. She also has shown me that the problem can be solved...

Terry Dahlgren, Timmins Literacy Council

Education to me is very important and one must have it in order to even try to stand on solid ground. Literacy is the biggest issue we all face and this problem involves not being able to read or write. But this is misunderstood. People see it as if the person has a deformation, and they seem to stay away from a person that doesn't have this ability...Anyone who knows someone who has this problem should take the time to try and help. It will only take a few hours out of your life, where this other has to suffer for the rest of her or his life not being able to read or write. All women should also do something now while there is still time, for our children will soon grow out of our reach, and most of them will have this disability and then it will be too late to help them.

Meeqwetch!

*Irene Skead, Literacy Coordinator,
Wauzhushk Onigum Nation, Kenora*