

Volunteer Handbook

Literacy Tutors
in a
Correctional Setting



Compiled by
The John Howard Society of Newfoundland

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Why Volunteer?	2
What to Consider before making a Commitment	3
Your Commitment as a Prison Volunteer	4
Volunteer Bill of Rights	5
Ten Commandments for Volunteers	6
Volunteering in a Correctional Setting	7
Correctional Staff	7
Things to Avoid	8
Profile of an Inmate	9
Understanding Inmates	9
Characteristics of an Illiterate Inmate	10
Characteristics of Adults as Learners	11
Sensitivity to the Illiterate Inmate	12
Literacy Statistics	13
Getting Started	14
Working Agreement	14
What to do on your First Visit	15
What you can do on Future Visits	15
A Basic Philosophy for Tutors	16
The Laws of Learning	18
The Law of Doing	18
The Law of Effect	18
The Law of Exercise	18
The Law of Primacy	19
Other Questions Answered	20

Introduction

This **Volunteer Handbook** has been compiled to provide you with information that will assist you in performing your duties as a Literacy Tutor or Computer Mentor in a Newfoundland Correctional Facility.

The information contained in this manual was presented to you during the course of your orientation. You will find this to be a useful resource as you begin your volunteer placement.

You have committed to working with offenders toward their successful reintegration into the community. Your friendship and skills will have a positive influence on inmates. You will become a facilitator and help inmates to make connections to literacy resources.

Volunteers are a necessary part of educational programs in prisons. You play a unique role in the correctional system. You will develop helping relationships with the inmates. Your contribution as a volunteer will make a positive impact on the culture of the Correctional Center. You will be providing services as a Literacy Tutor that would not be otherwise available to inmates. Your presence is important and appreciated.

Darlene George

Literacy Co-ordinator

John Howard Society of Newfoundland

Please Note: To avoid the awkward use of “he/she”, “him/her”, throughout the text, the male person has been used. All such references can be applied to the female person.

Why Volunteer?

People volunteer for a variety of reasons.

- * To help people.
- * To learn more about yourself.
- * Skill development.
- * To productivity use leisure time.
- * New challenges.

Working with offenders can certainly be a very challenging, yet rewarding experience.

What to Consider before making a Commitment

"You are more trouble than you are worth." Linus to Lucy.

One of the most common complaints about volunteers is their unreliability. Unfortunately, this complaint does have a considerable factual basis. Many volunteers do fail to keep their commitments, and in many cases, they do this because they agree to take on a task without fully considering all the aspects.

Before you commit yourself to some type of volunteer service, you should think things over carefully. Changing your mind later on could create serious problems.

Before making a commitment, you should at least consider:

- The job description. Make sure you clearly understand what is expected of you.
- Your values, ethics and goals. These should not conflict with those of the program.
- Will your contribution be meaningful to you?
- Will your objectives in volunteering be met?
- Home and business commitments.
- Travel time and method.
- The time you have available. Don't over commit yourself.
- Potential costs, such as transportation.
- What provision can be made if there is a need to change your commitment?

Your Commitment as a Prison Volunteer

Understand your own limitations. Believe in yourself and your ability to be of help to someone else.

Understand your own motivations, and be willing to share this honestly with the offender.

Reveal to the offender exactly what your relationship can do for him.

Remember your relationship is to be more than mere surface level, but at his own pace.

Listen to the offender.

Relate to the offender as he is, not to as you wish him to be.

Evaluate priorities and progress based on your relationship, but never become judgemental. You are not a Court of Law. You are not even a juror. You are a friend.

Respond to his mistakes or failures with firmness, but remain secure in the knowledge that failures are not final.

Strive for the basic purpose of helping the inmate to become a responsible human being.

Volunteer Bill of Rights

Volunteers have the right to be treated with the same respect as paid staff, but not as free labour. In order to ensure proper working conditions, as a volunteer, you have the right to:

Sufficient Information

You are entitled to receive a job description, training and orientation for your volunteer duties and to be kept informed about matters that affect you.

Express Your Opinions

Your ideas and criticisms will be received and considered.

Organize

You will act and combine with others to support organizational activities.

Protection

You will have adequate physical, emotional and legal protection.

Express Individual Creativity

You will share your personality and skills as well as your time.

Perform Useful Work

You will perform your duties without being a hindrance to those with whom you work and serve.

Recognition

Volunteers will receive commitment from and give commitment to your place of service.

Promotion

Consideration will be given for more responsible volunteer positions.

Ten Commandments for Volunteers

1. Understand the job you undertake.
2. Accept training appreciatively and contribute your own experience.
3. Match your interests to the needs and the job.
4. Serve faithfully and report new insights about your work.
5. Discover its meaning to the total program.
6. Open yourself to opportunities for growth in skill, sympathy, self-confidence and responsibility.
7. Value your special two-way role as community interpreter.
8. Contribute to supervision by self-evaluation and a willingness to ask questions.
9. Give loyalty to your organization and its program.
10. Take pride in your volunteer career. It pays handsomely in treasures of the spirit.

Volunteering in a Correctional Setting

Remember that the offenders you work with are in these correctional centers because of the crimes they have committed. They are incarcerated for the protection of society and will hopefully rehabilitate during their sentence.

You have already agreed to follow the rules and regulations of the institution. Remember to ask a staff member if you are uncertain about anything.

Inmates may often make requests of volunteers. Before committing, be sure to check with the correctional officer to ensure it is appropriate.

Correctional Staff

You will be working with staff within the institution. You should familiarize yourself with the positions and titles of correctional staff.

Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent

The Superintendent is in charge of the institution. He supervises staff and manages the operations of the correctional center.

Lieutenants

Lieutenants are responsible for the institution during their shift. Any questions or concerns should be directed to the Lieutenant on duty.

Correctional Officers

Correctional Officers are responsible for the security of the prison. Volunteers will have the most contact with Correctional Officers.

Classification Officer

The Classification Officer is responsible for classifying inmates and referring them to

appropriate treatment and training programs.

Volunteer Coordinator

The Coordinator is responsible for the recruitment, training and supervision of volunteers.

Things to Avoid

Don't inquire about the inmate's crime or other areas that may be embarrassing.

Don't be shocked or surprised by anything he says, or the way it is said.

Don't underestimate the value of this friendship.

Don't make your visit an "Ego Trip". Don't use inmates to work out your own problems. Build their self-esteem, not yours.

Avoid commitments to unreasonable things. Don't promise things unless you are sure you can follow through. Ensure you have first checked with the proper authorities.

Avoid getting financially involved with the inmate or his family. If there is concern about the welfare of the family, you should pass this on to the classification officer, so that this matter can be dealt with appropriately.

Don't pass messages. This is against regulations.

Don't purchase prison made articles from inmates.

Don't mail any items for inmates. These require inspection first, which must be done by correctional officials.

Don't give money or other articles. This is "contraband".

When in doubt about anything, wait, and talk with a correctional officer.

Profile of an Inmate

The average provincial inmate is a single male, age 29, with a self-reported grade 10 or less education. He is non-aboriginal and unemployed. He has no vocational training, and any employment has been for low wages.

The nature of his offence is well distributed in the areas of property offences, impaired driving and violent offences. There are often problems with substance abuse and social cognition.

Understanding Inmates

An inmate soon realizes the impact of loneliness, as he is separated from family and friends. He misses his freedom and other things that we take for granted, e.g. using the telephone. He is missing life events of his family, such as a birth or death.

In many cases, he feels the victim of injustice. He may find it hard to accept the fact that he is responsible for his imprisonment.

He cannot deal with his personal problems and chooses to ignore them.

He will often agree to any programs or opportunities that will help him to get out of prison.

Characteristics of an Illiterate Inmate

Life history of failure.

Emotional problems.

Lacking career direction.

Pessimistic about the future.

Overactive/hyperactive as a child.

Unsupervised as a child.

Disliked at school.

A property offender.

Rarely comes from an intact family.

Likelihood of having committed other unknown crimes is high.

Has a 50% chance of returning to prison.

Substance abuse.

Establishes superficial relationships with others - expects little, gets little.

Employment history short and intermittent.

Financially poor.

Generally unsuccessful, even as a criminal.

Characteristics of Adults as Learners

Adults are more realistic. They have lived longer and have a different perspective of life.

Adults have had more experience.

Adults have needs which are more concrete and immediate than those of children.

Adults do not comprise a captive audience. They attend voluntarily and if interest is lacking, they are inclined to stop attending.

Adults are used to being treated as mature persons and resent having teachers talk down to them.

Adults enjoy having their talents made use of in a teaching situation.

Adult groups are likely to be more heterogeneous than youth groups. Differences increase with age and mobility. Therefore, adults come from a wider variety of backgrounds and intelligence levels than youth.

Adults, through their fifties, and sometimes well beyond that, can learn as well as youth. Because of a slowing up of physical equipment, they may not perform some school tasks as rapidly as children.

Adults attend classes with a mixed set of motives - educational, social, recreational, and sometimes out of an overdeveloped sense of duty.

Adults are sometimes fatigued when they attend classes. They appreciate any teaching devices which add interest and a sense of liveliness: variety of method, audio-visual aids, change of pace and a sense of humour.

Taken from: A Guide for Teachers and Teacher Trainers (NAPCAE, 1966), Robert L. Derbyshire, Consultant.

Sensitivity to the Illiterate Inmate

Imagine you are in a foreign country and are unable to speak the language. You are

alone and do not have anyone to translate for you. You can't read the street signs and are unable to ask for directions. Frustrating, isn't it? How does it make you feel? Isolated?

Be sensitive to an inmate's needs. Your student may have great difficulty admitting to having problems with reading and writing. There is a stigma attached to illiteracy, and many individuals feel that the inability to read means low intelligence. You will have to take into consideration that many have developed a lifetime of coping skills to hide their illiteracy. It will take time to develop a trusting relationship with your student. Be patient.

Literacy Statistics

Illiteracy Increases from West to East

Canada	24%
British Columbia	17%
Alberta	21%
Saskatchewan/Manitoba	19%
Ontario	24%
Quebec	28%
Maritimes	25%
Newfoundland	44%

Illiteracy Drops with Education

University Graduates	8%
Community College/Trades School	11%
University Dropouts	13%
High School Graduates	17%
High School Dropouts	24%
Grades 5 - 8	53%
To Grade 4	72%

Source: The Creative Research Group

Getting Started

You are about to begin a new experience which will be challenging, frustrating at times, and yet, very rewarding. These sections will help you to get started.

Working Agreement

As a volunteer, I agree to the following commitments:

- To perform all duties to the best of my ability.
- To keep my commitments. If I am unable to attend an arranged activity, I will call in advance.
- To follow the rules and regulations of the correctional center.
- To follow the direction of the Correctional Staff. I realize they are responsible for the security of the institution.
- To adhere to the Statement of Confidentiality.
- To seek advice if I am unsure of anything.
- To attend volunteer meetings and to participate in training sessions.
- To submit monthly time/activity reports to the Volunteer Coordinator.
- To conduct myself in such a manner that I am a positive example to inmates.

What to do on your First Visit

Relax! Inmates are people with the same needs as you.

Bring some materials to the first lesson.

Agree on the times and days of your sessions. Begin keeping a tutoring calendar.

Let him talk about himself and his family. Get to know him as a person.

Be sensitive about when to leave. A first visit should be no longer than 45 minutes.

Learn the rules of the institution in which he lives. Obey the rules. Learn the names of the officials. Respect them. They are doing their job. Do not join with the inmate in criticism of the courts, the police, the correctional officers or the institution.

Express to the student your satisfaction with the visit. Tell him when you expect to return. If for any reason you cannot keep the appointment, be sure to contact the institution.

What you can do on Future Visits

Learn the likes and needs of your student. Respect his feelings, beliefs and opinions, without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing with him. Agreeing with his negative attitudes only strengthens his undesirable traits, while disagreeing will endanger your chances of compatibility.

Listen for the positive and commend it.

Challenge him to proper attitudes and behaviour.

Don't be discouraged if you do not see immediate results.

Expect him to take responsibility for himself.

Help him deal realistically with his guilt. Do not defend his crimes and failures.

Work with the institution.

A Basic Philosophy for Tutors

The most important part of the volunteer program is your genuine devotion to and concern for your student.

Your primary goal as a tutor is to help a new reader acquire basic literacy skills. To do this, you'll need to build a ladder of successful learning experiences. Success helps to build the self-confidence needed by the student to tackle more difficult material, to be willing to try something new, to risk failure, and to understand that mistakes are a part of the learning process.

Before getting started, think carefully. Are you prepared to follow through on this program? Your respect for and commitment to your student are essential ingredients in that success-building process. A volunteer who drops out can be a tremendous disappointment to a new reader.

How should you relate to your student as you build this success? It can be summarized in two words - rapport and patience.

Rapport

No learning of any kind can take place unless you interact with your student. Tutoring must be a relaxed, friendly experience in order to create a climate for learning. Be honest and sincere. Take the time to be both genial and warm. These qualities provide the basics for good tutor-student rapport.

Patience

Recognize that the learning will be difficult at times. It is easy to feel discouraged if you don't seem to be making progress. Help the student recognize the gains in skills, however small, that are the evidence of growth. Be patient and praise him for what he has learned. Help him feel that he is part of a team: when things get difficult, you'll both be there looking for ways to make it easier. Each session should be a rewarding experience for both of you.

The Laws of Learning

Effective learning experiences have several things in common - whether we are learning to drive a car, repair a motor, or read a simple sentence. As tutors, you'll need to be aware of these things and how you can use them to design successful lessons.

The Law of Doing

Students don't learn as the result of what tutors do, but as a result of what tutors get them to do. This basic principle is equally important for students and tutors to understand. The student who expects to learn by simply sitting back and listening is likely to be disappointed. The tutor, on the other hand, who relies solely on the "I'll lecture, you listen" type of teaching is not likely to see much learning taking place.

Why is this? Learning is change - behavioural change in an individual. Behavioural changes don't truly become part of a person, until he has reinforced them through use. For example, a student can memorize the operation of a piece of equipment, or a new word for his vocabulary. But he doesn't actually "learn" those things until he practises operating the equipment or using the new word. The student, in short, must be involved in the process of learning.

The Law of Effect

People tend to accept and repeat those responses which are pleasant and satisfying and to avoid those which are annoying. If an adult finds that he is learning to read and enjoying the process as well, he will tend to keep returning to class. In short, "nothing succeeds like success". Students should experience personal satisfaction from each learning activity and should achieve some success in each class period

The Law of Exercise

The more often an act is repeated, the faster the habit is established. Practice makes perfect - if the practice is of the right kind. Practising the wrong thing will become a habit too - one which is hard to break.

The Law of Primacy

First impressions are the most lasting. This means that those first lessons are all-important. The tutor should arouse interest and provide subject matter which meets the student's immediate needs.

Other Questions Answered

What is a volunteer?

Someone who gives their time, talent and energy to help others.

How old should a volunteer be?

Volunteers should be at least 19 years old. The volunteer will be working with offenders whose adjustments have been faulty in one or more areas. It makes sense to look for people who have achieved healthy adjustments in their own lives. Maturity, rather than chronological age, is the primary consideration.

What qualifications would a volunteer need?

No specific experience or qualifications are required for most volunteer positions. However, if a person has special skills in the areas of education and computers, these can certainly be of valuable assistance to many offenders.

Laubach Literacy of Canada provides training to individuals who want to work as a Literacy Tutor.

The most important and essential qualifications any volunteer should have is the desire to help others, ability to communicate effectively and a strong commitment.

How important is a good education?

While a good education may give a volunteer added insight into himself and others, it is certainly no guarantee of effectiveness. Of much more importance is the volunteer's stability, maturity and willingness to be of help.

When would I volunteer?

You can volunteer any time that is convenient for you; during the day, after school, evenings or weekends.

Can retired persons volunteer?

Absolutely. There are many vigorous, retired people whose accomplishments, interests and available time make them excellent candidates for volunteering.