



THE JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY PEER TUTORING PROGRAM

A Mid-Term Report

Last fall, John Howard Society's literacy department launched an exciting new pilot project.

We had been working on basic literacy with inmates in the Remand Centre for well over a decade, mainly through the use of group instruction and community volunteer tutors. When we met for strategic planning sessions in 2012, we decided to take our program in a brand new direction.

Over the years we had noticed our learners working together outside of regular class time, often with higher-literacy learners assisting their less experienced friends. The more we talked about how to make the most of the limited classroom time we have with our students, the more we realized that some of the best instruction in our program happens when we're not even in the room! We began to think about ways we could make better use of the Remand Centre's unique resources: inmates' skills

and talents, their willingness to help their peers, and their access to one another during the long, boring days on their living units.

Jacquie Nicholson, our literacy coordinator, designed a course and a handbook for inmates who wanted to become peer tutors. She now trains, supervises, and supports them, as well as offering extra instruction to their students. As you'll see, the results have been pretty incredible.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS: SIX MONTHS IN

- Trained 12 peer tutors, nine of whom have gone on to work with students in the Winnipeg Remand Centre
- Worked with 20 literacy learners – 10 of these learners worked with peer tutors and 10 worked with community tutors or JHS staff
- Distributed 12 boxes of learning materials into the Winnipeg Remand Centre, including games, graphic novels, and GED preparation textbooks
- Supported three student-initiated fundraisers, which raised over \$2,200 for community organizations like the Turtle Island Neighbourhood Centre, the Andrews Street Family Centre, and the Canadian Cancer Society
- Been featured in the *Canstar Times*, the *Canstar Metro*, the *Winnipeg Metro*, on CBC TV and radio, and CKUW radio
- Assisted 13 students and other incarcerated men with recording storybooks on CD as gifts for their children or grandchildren
- Produced three editions of the *Inside Scoop*, a quarterly newsletter of writing and art written for inmates, by inmates
- Had one peer tutor complete his GED and two literacy learners continue their learning after their release: one in a skilled trades program and one at the Aboriginal Centre's literacy program

“ I had heard that this program helps you become a better and more positive person, so I decided to give it a try.

Participant,
JHS literacy program

“ I want to get a real job and be a good role model to my two boys, and I know education is the first step.

Participant,
JHS literacy program

OUR PEER TUTOR TRAINING COURSE

The peer tutor training group course is 12 hours altogether: ten sessions at approximately an hour and a quarter each, and including a “practicum” component where tutors are asked to role-play leading a classmate through a literacy activity.

Some of the main subject areas the course covers are:

- Basic principles of adult learning
- Stage levels of literacy
- How to help a learner set short and long-term goals
- How to choose learning materials and prepare for lessons
- Specific strategies for teaching reading, writing and numeracy
- Evaluating progress and maintaining learner motivation

Peer tutors receive a manual that they use as a “textbook” during the course, and that also serves as a resource book once they've completed the course and begun tutoring.

It includes goal-setting charts, Stages progress checklists, step-by-step instructions for dozens of literacy activities, and authentic learning texts at a wide range of reading levels to use in sessions with learners. They also receive a peer tutor resource kit – a box that contains everything a new tutor needs in order to work with learners on their living units.

When tutors complete the course, the coordinator will try to match them with a learner from their living unit. This may be someone who is already enrolled in the program and awaiting a tutor, or it could be someone the tutor seeks out on his own. The learner and tutor fill out a learning contract detailing when and how often they are going to meet. The literacy coordinator meets regularly with both tutor and learner to provide support to both.

So far we have trained 12 peer tutors. We do have some challenges with tutor retention, as many inmates in Remand Centre are transferred unexpectedly to other institutions in order to deal with overcrowding. Eleven peer tutors signed up for the first training course and eight for the second. In the first course, we lost five tutors due to transfers and releases and in the second course we lost two, for a total of six graduates in each course.

Fortunately, ongoing communication with unit managers in the Remand Centre has enabled us to select the peer tutors who are most likely to be in the facility long term, so despite losing a few individuals unexpectedly, we have still been able to recruit sufficient numbers of peer tutors to the program.

Of our 12 graduates so far, nine have gone on to work with one or more students in the Remand Centre, and almost all of them achieved some of their personal literacy goals outside of just completing the peer tutor course. You'll find more information about peer tutors' specific activities and goals on page five.

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I'm now able to approach people keeping in mind that they may not be able to read or write, and I have strategies to help them.

Peer tutor,

JHS literacy program



TUTOR RESOURCE KITS INCLUDE:

Dictionary

Thesaurus

Book of word puzzles

Set of index cards

Cardboard protractor

Cardboard ruler

Deck of playing cards

JHS literacy and personal development workbook

GED preparation book, Canadian edition

Bananagrams spelling game

3 cards for Math Bingo numeracy game

2 magazines

Graphic novel, Health Aboriginal Network

Scribbler

Lined notepad

6 sheets of graph paper

OUR PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

At any given time there are between 15 and 22 participants registered in the John Howard Society literacy program in Remand Centre.

Here is a sample breakdown of participants from the first week of February, 2014.

- Seven peer tutors enrolled in the latest peer tutor training course
- Five graduated peer tutors still in custody, four of them actively working with students
- Four literacy students working regularly with peer tutors
- Two literacy students working regularly with community tutors
- Three literacy students working independently, and meeting regularly with the literacy coordinator for instruction and assistance

On Monday and Friday nights, peer tutors attend training from 6:00 to 7:30 in the multi-purpose room. Then, from 7:30 to 8:30 the room is open for one-to-one tutoring, between both peer tutors and their students, and community volunteers and theirs. The literacy coordinator also sees learners and tutors one-to-one during this time, as well as on Thursday afternoons.

Tutoring takes place on the units as well, particularly between tutors and learners who are cellmates, those who have a common “break” period on the unit, or even those who live side-by-side and can read to one another through the vents in their cells. Tutors initiate learning games with groups in the common areas of the units, and these include both inmates who are registered in the John Howard Society literacy program and those who are not. Tutors also assist fellow inmates – both students and non-students – with daily literacy tasks such as filling out court documents or institutional forms, reading the newspaper, and writing letters to loved ones.

Peer tutors in training have approximately three hours of group instruction per week, plus one-to-one meetings with the coordinator as needed. Learners have at minimum one hour of instruction per week, but those working with peer tutors may enjoy up to six or seven hours, depending on how much access they have to one another on the unit, and whether they get instruction from the program coordinator as well. The average learner gets about 3-4 instructional hours per week, most of that being one-to-one work with their peer tutor.

AUTHENTIC LEARNING

JHS literacy has three major authentic learning outlets – programs within our program that we've established in order to provide our learners with creative real-world opportunities to use their literacy skills. Both tutors and learners participate in these programs:

Get the Story Out

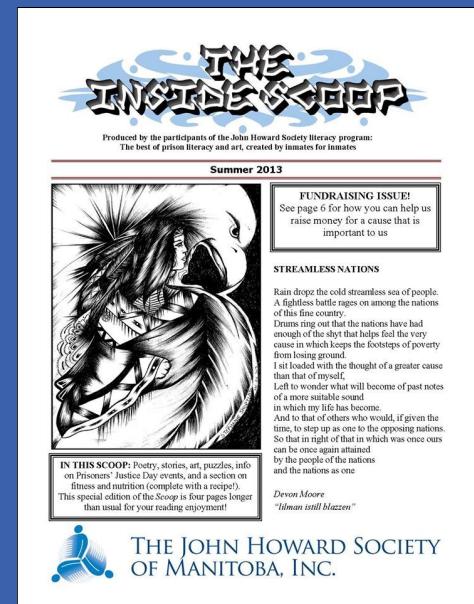
Inmates record themselves reading stories to their children or other young relatives, and staff burn the recording to CD and send it to the child in the mail along with the storybooks.

The Inside Scoop

Inmates write poems, stories, and editorials for the program's quarterly newsletter, which is distributed in all jails and prisons in Manitoba as well as shared online and in the community.

The Inside Scoop Editorial Board

Participants meet once-per-month to design, plan, and edit the *Inside Scoop*. They run these meetings mostly on their own and make decisions by consensus. The planning of the newsletter includes producing its content, as well as coming up with special features and promotions such as contests and fundraisers.



SUCCESS STORIES: THE BEST OF 2013-2014

We are extremely pleased with how the first few months of this pilot project have gone. We've seen a high degree of interest from peer tutors and have had very positive reviews of the course from participants, including those who came into the program ambivalent about actually tutoring.

One peer tutor announced on the last day of class, "To be honest, I signed up for this just to get off the range, but I ended up learning a lot and I'm actually really looking forward to tutoring someone." That particular tutor ended up being one of the most active participants in group discussions during the course, and did indeed go on to tutor a fellow inmate from right after his "graduation" until his release from the Remand Centre.

We're delighted that nine of the 12 tutors trained so far have gone on to work with learners, and even those who haven't have found the course useful in other ways, and have achieved some of their own literacy goals during their time in the program.

Our peer tutor resource kits are also getting rave reviews. Not only have the kits been helpful to the tutors in their work with students, but we're told that they've contributed to a broader culture of literacy and learning on the units, with peer tutors initiating literacy games in groups and lending out their GED books or graphic novels to people who aren't even formally involved in the literacy program as students.

Just as we'd hoped, this program model has allowed us to improve the efficiency of the literacy program.

PEER TUTORING AT A GLANCE

- 75% (nine out of 12) of peer tutors have gone on to work with at least one learner in the Remand Centre after their graduation.
- About 90% (11 out of 12) of peer tutors made some progress towards personal learning goals independent of tutoring during their time in the program
- About 60% (7 out of 12) of the peer tutors participated in the activities of the *Inside Scoop* editorial board.

Because of inmates' copious spare time and easy access to other individuals on their unit, there are many more hours in a week available to be used for tutoring than there were in our old model, which relied on the presence of volunteers or literacy staff and the use of the Remand Centre's multi-purpose room.

We've seen an increase in the number of instructional hours available to each student, as well as an increase in the number of people involved in the program, with 32 learners to report in our interim stats this year compared to only 21 last year. There are about 15 – 20 inmates in the program at once, rather than 8-12, as we had in the old program.

We've had some really exciting student-initiated projects this year. For the second year in a row, the *Inside Scoop* editorial board organized a fundraiser for local community organizations, raising over \$1,400 that they used to purchase sports equipment, games, and arts and crafts supplies for Ndinawé Youth Resource Centre and the Turtle Island Community Centre.

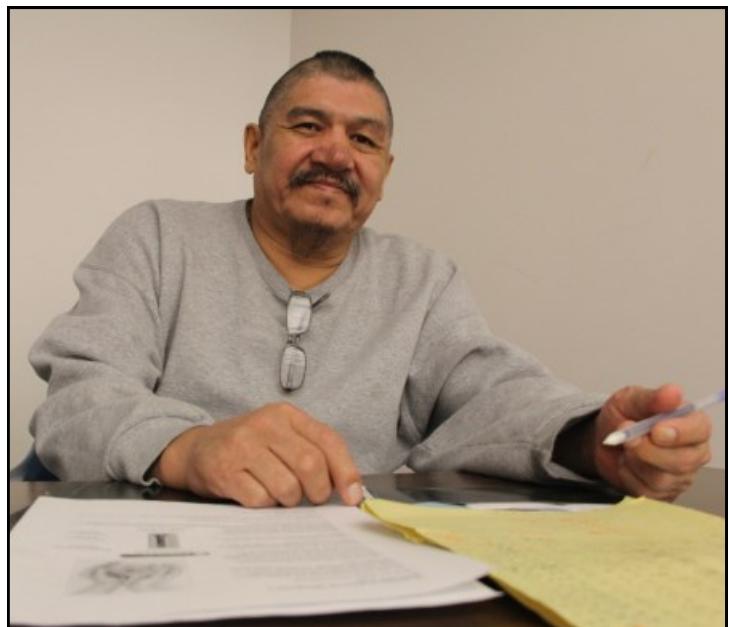
The fundraiser was an excellent opportunity for authentic literacy activities. Students wrote fundraising letters to local sports retailers; they created posters to advertise their campaign in the Remand Centre; they did interviews with the benefiting community organizations and wrote summaries of their activities for the newsletter; they created sample budgets to make decisions about what items to purchase with the money raised. Students and tutors from the program were interviewed for both CKUW community radio and the *Canstar Times*.



Editorial board member Darren Brown and literacy coordinator Jacquie Nicholson deliver a truckload of art materials, cultural craft supplies, and board games to Ndinawé.



Literacy coordinator Jacquie Nicholson displays the fundraising art calendar created by students in the program



Peer tutor Patrick Shingoose poses for a newspaper article on the fundraiser he spearheaded for the Canadian Cancer Society.

The board decided to get a jump start on their 2014 fundraiser just a few weeks later, producing an art calendar to raise money for the Andrews Street Family Centre. Again they enjoyed some media attention for their efforts and found the experience energizing and empowering. One board member whose art is featured in the calendar had been released from the Remand Centre during its creation, so he was able to participate in an interview with CBC radio and attend the art calendar's official launch here at the JHS office. The fundraiser has brought in over \$1,000 so far for Andrews Street family Centre, a resource centre for children and families in the William Whyte neighbourhood and a place dear to the hearts of many of our students.

One peer tutor in the program recently launched his own personal project to raise money for the Canadian Cancer Society, in memory of his daughter who he lost two years ago to the disease. Patrick Shingoose began a one-man bike-a-thon in January, and is hoping to ride 1,400 miles on the Remand Centre's stationary bike before his release date in July. He is taking pledges for each mile he goes and will be sponsoring himself \$10 per month for the rest of his time in custody. More information about Patrick and his fundraising initiative can be found online at <http://convio.cancer.ca/goto/bike2014>.

Fundraising and other types of community engagement provide excellent learning opportunities for our students: everything from goal-setting to letter-writing to budgeting to participating in meetings. Additionally, it helps them to feel connected to their communities, which is especially important for individuals who are incarcerated.

Again and again our learners tell us that participating in the literacy program is one of their proudest accomplishments and one of their most important means of staying connected to the world outside. This is an outcome just as valuable as any essential skill we can teach. To us, literacy is about more than just reading and writing. It's about building confidence, exercising creativity, and being part of a team.



This drawing by Stephanie Shorting is one of twelve beautiful pieces featured in the art calendar.



Literacy department staff pose outside the John Howard Society building on a winter day just before the holiday break. Katherine Johnston (at left) is the department's program evaluator and assessment worker. Chuck Wright (center) runs the community literacy program, and Jacquie Nicholson (right) is the coordinator of the peer tutor program.

This program would not be possible if it were not for the support of our funders and donors. Special thanks to Manitoba Justice, The United Way of Winnipeg, and the Department of Adult Learning and Literacy, who provide the core funding for our program. Adult Learning and Literacy also provided us with the grant that enabled us to undertake our strategic planning activities last program year.

Thanks also to the Assiniboine Credit Union, whose support allowed us to research and write the peer tutor training course and curriculum, and to the Winnipeg Foundation, who gave us a grant to hire an evaluator to assess the effectiveness of our program. Thank you to a long-time supporter, who

prefers to remain anonymous, whose generosity enabled us to relocate to a bigger office within our building and stock it with tons of excellent books.

Thank you to the dozens of people who donated books and baking for our fundraiser last spring, as well as all those who helped out at that event. The proceeds allowed us to spoil our tutors and students rotten with the resource kits pictured earlier in this report.

And thanks to everyone who supported the numerous fundraisers organized by our students over the past year. Your kindness means the world to us, and to them.



THE JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY
OF MANITOBA, INC.