

Declaration of Principles

For Literacy Tutors and Literacy Staff of the John Howard Society

We tutor for the John Howard Society because we believe that literacy is a fundamental human right, much like food, water and shelter. Like food, water and shelter, literacy should be available to all people, no matter their employment status, their ability or disability, and whether or not they have committed a crime.

We tutor because we believe that literacy opens up opportunities, gives people greater autonomy over their personal decisions, and empowers them to build a better life.

However, we also acknowledge that JHS tutors or staff do not get to define for our learners what “a better life” looks like. We recognize that as highly literate and non-incarcerated people, we enjoy privileges in society that our clients do not. We may also benefit from other types of privilege, such as economic, racial or ability privilege. We therefore are not in a position to give our students advice or to presume what types of options are available to them. Students will decide for themselves how best to use the skills they gain in this program.

We understand that crime is a systemic issue that often has less to do with moral failings or poor impulse control than it does with poverty, racism, colonialism, and other oppressions. As a result, we do not judge our clients, and we recognize that given similar life circumstances, we may have made those same choices ourselves. At the same time, we understand that all people have a degree of control over their decision-making, and that literacy education is one way of empowering people to make the best choices they can.

We are not here to counsel or to impart wisdom on our students, but rather to support them in their learning as best we can. It is also not our role to form friendships with our clients. We recognize that the ideal educational relationship develops a respectful, adult-to-adult rapport, with learning as the primary objective of this relationship.

We take a learner-centred approach, where students are always actively involved in plotting the course of their own learning, and which integrates the learner's interests, goals, and life experiences.

We promote critical thinking in our work and we recognize it is a vital part of living in a world where we encounter information, ideas and opinions everywhere we turn. We feel it is an integral part of literacy education to develop the capacity of ourselves and our clients to differentiate “good” information from “bad” and find creative solutions to problems.

We have every expectation that we will learn as much from our students as they do from us.