



# Tutor Dorothy

Adult Literacy: 1 to 1

*Multi-Service Centre - 2011*

Tutor Dorothy has been volunteering in her community for more than 25 years! Two factors compelled her to take a leap into tutoring: the selling of the family business last year and her friendship with a gainfully employed man who could not read or write. Dorothy could not believe, "in our country, with the job he had" that her friend could be in such a situation. Toward the end of his life, with Dorothy's help, he did manage to "learn a lot."

Dorothy did not know what to expect when she decided to apply to be a volunteer with MSC's Adult Literacy & Essential Skills program. The training that all tutors undergo made Dorothy realize that her friend "was not the only one." The realization that there were so many who lacked the gift of literacy made Dorothy a little angry but, after her first tutoring session, she was so high she called several friends and her sister to share her joy with them.

Tutoring has provided many "aha" moments and a feeling of exhilaration watching the learning process. Her student is very motivated, and as is the case with other tutors, she has developed a special relationship with her student. While Dorothy's student knows numbers and the alphabet, the sounds of letters are very difficult for him – especially the short a and e vowel sounds.

The pair are moving along at a good pace because Dorothy's student is so eager. "He is meeting all of my expectations and more", says Dorothy, noting that, "he knows more than he thinks." Like many before him, Dorothy's student thought he was "the only one" and was surprised to find that that was not the case. For that reason, Dorothy also monitors her student's self-esteem, not allowing him to say things like "I'm so stupid", pointing out he "has just never had the opportunity to learn." She notes how good his memory is and the fact that, besides his learning journey, he works full-time and has many family responsibilities. Helping him learn how to spell his children's names has been a special bonus.

Dorothy and her student often read the newspaper together. At first, her student said, "there are so many words I don't know." Dorothy encouraged his progress by advising him to "pick words you do know" and build from

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there. Dorothy finds this type of activity builds on their Skill Book lessons and has real-world impact. For example, helping her student break local and everyday words into pieces he knows (e.g., Wood – stock) is something Dorothy feels anyone could relate to when helping someone read. It reminds her of helping her grandchildren with their reading. “You don’t have to be a teacher....sometimes I think it’s better if you’re not”, says Dorothy, noting the students are aware of the volunteer nature of the role. Dorothy sees the mutual benefit in the roles – one wants to learn and the other wants to help and both are enriched by that.

For those that are worried about the time commitment and the preparation required, Dorothy has noted it is like many things: for her first meeting, she took over 2 hours to prepare. Now she has a rhythm and it takes her less than one hour to get ready. “You get better at it”, says Dorothy and she has learned how to communicate many things she once took for granted – for example, the role of capital letters and listing words that show the different sounds a vowel like ‘a’ can signify (e.g., apple, can, band). Her confidence has been building alongside her student.

While Dorothy has volunteered extensively in the past (4H, community events), she has found tutoring especially rewarding because she feels she is helping not only her student but his entire family. She already anticipates a time when her student will move on and “I’m going to miss him.”

When asked if anything about tutoring has surprised her she says, “Well, I’m surprised I get such a kick out of it.” Having finally taken the plunge into this role she has now added to her “to do” list: volunteering in palliative care, parachuting and taking a ride in a Harvard! The Adult Literacy program started something!

