**Some recent feedback from some of our Jail Learners (October 2019)**

It all started very spontaneously a few weeks ago. One of the inmates (we presently work with females in Sawyer County), was thanking me at the end of our session and stated in a pleasant tone, “I always like coming to Literacy.” A light switch flipped in me. “You do? Could you tell me why; tell me some more about what you mean?” And then it came to me:

***“If I’m going to be part of a panel to share about “Tips and Lessons Learned” from a Jail Literacy Program, who better to speak than THE INMATES THEMSELVES about what is important in a Literacy program there?!”***

**So I bring you their voices, all the way from NW Wisconsin—what they felt was good, positive, or beneficial because of their participation in Literacy at the Jail:**

* **You’re consistent. You actually show up. Actually show you care.**
* **There’s a variety of subjects and things. You help us with our own interests and tailor make it for each of us.**
* **You don’t throw too much at us at once [like another program she referred to that is there]. In that program it’s like I’m in school and all I can do is study study study—have my nose in a book or booklet.**
* **We get opportunities to learn different things.**
* **It’s informational and educational—there’s a variety.**
* **We get help with our schoolwork.**
* **You support us; you’re consistent in being here. You’re mentally/emotionally supportive. I’ve never opened up or shared with anyone, like with you. (tutors).**
* **Encourage us.**
* **Provide books, bibles, other helpful articles and things like that.**
* **Good books, inspiring reading. Positive stuff.**
* **Improve ourselves and get an education.**
* **Help us get set up when we get out—when we “touch down”.**
* **You know that you have someone out there who cares. [referring to themselves knowing we/Literacy/the tutors are “out there” and that we care about them]**
* **You’ve helped me grow mentally, and helped me change to a new or different perspective. A different way of looking at something.**
* **New and different things to do and learn; a wide variety. I especially like the Career [Exploration] surveys! Learn about myself.**
* **Study for Driver’s License.**
* **Bring books in.**
* **Very supportive. In jail there’s not much to do, but you guys help a lot—you bring a lot to the table.**
* **Look forward to it every week. I tell the others, “Oh, it’s Thursday! We all get to go to Literacy!”**
* **You are open-minded. You ask us what we want or need—not telling/pushing us what we need.**
* **I kind of “feel at home”—you’re non-judgmental. I can tell you things and you won’t judge me.**
* **Literacy gives new ideas, other options or focus of what we can be about.**

**The last comments were specifically messages to you, the attendees. I asked, “If you could be sitting on the panel next to me at the Conference, what would you like to say to them about starting a Literacy Program at their local Jail?” Here are the responses:**

* **I want them to know [at the Conference]— “Be sure you know what their (the learners’) goals are and provide for those. “Take an interest in THEIR interests.”**
* **Tell them [at the Conference], “If you like to help out, give people guidance, and be someone who listens, start Literacy at your jail!”**
* **“Sign up for Literacy! Do Literacy!” [at the Jail]**
* **The last woman who provided feedback wanted to pose this compelling question to the Conference attendees, who might, or might not be considering starting a Literacy Program at the local jail:** 
  + **“*How would you expect the community to rebuild themselves if you don’t help us build a better road to walk?”***

BTW…When I queried, “What suggestions do you have for us… What don’t you like… What needs to improve?” They came up with nothing. Hmmm…maybe I was asking the wrong individuals! :-O

**THANKS FOR LISTENING and considering beginning a Jail Literacy Program in your community! I don’t think you’ll regret it!**

**~ Deb Helquist, Sawyer County Adult Literacy Coordinator**