



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Dorothy McEvoy and her first student for the day tackle the intricacies of multiplying and reducing fractions together.

# Bringing a Little Success Into Oft-Neglected Lives

## An Incurable Optimist Tutors at

By Teresa A. Parsons

Handling troublemakers in class is a skill Dorothy McEvoy has thoroughly mastered, but never enjoyed. A former school teacher, she's seen kids suspended from school or kicked out of class, and believes it's an action that's often demanded in fairness to other students.

But she now faces the other side of the disciplinary coin when she tutors young inmates in the Monroe County Jail three days a week.

McEvoy remembers asking one particularly apt student why he dropped out. "I didn't," he responded, "they kicked me out."

Hearing first-hand the experiences of kids who for the most part have been in trouble all their lives, McEvoy hasn't questioned past decisions, but has dedicated her efforts to building confidence within her students. Although algebra or social studies may not appear to be crucial skills for someone convicted or waiting to be convicted of a crime, she believes that she is helping her students experience success — even if it's only being able to multiply fractions — as the first tiny step toward a different way of life.

Her first student last Friday was a 20-year-old man who is serving a sentence of one year and preferred not to be identified by name. Dropping out of school at 17, he recalls trying to attend night classes at East High School for awhile, but eventually giving it up.

McEvoy and he began working together at the beginning of June. Since then, he has begun to think of attending college when he passes his high school exam, which illustrates her point about small successes building confidence to take on larger goals. They were working on fractions, and the neat sheets of homework he pulled out bore silent testimony to his determination.

For nearly 27 years, McEvoy taught in Rochester-area schools, mostly the intermediate grades in the Rush-Henrietta school district. Having retired in 1983, she remembers searching for something to do and seeing an advertisement for the job in the newspaper. She knew right away it was for her.

McEvoy's interest in prison work began in 1975 when she joined Literacy Volunteers. A 15-hour workshop was required, and perhaps fate dictated that it should be offered at Attica State Prison from an inmate. She continued volunteering there for three years and recalls being one of only two "street people" in the tutorial program — the only other person from outside the prison was the program coordinator, a VISTA volunteer.

Despite the fact that Attica houses some of the most dangerous inmates in the state's prison system and that 63-year-old Dorothy is of very unimposing size and stature, she's never been afraid of the people she's met then or now in jail.

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