

Access Lives

tors at the Monroe County Jail

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"You see them as people," she said. "The results of their crimes aren't visible and so it's easy to accept these individuals as people and try to help them accept themselves as individuals."

McEvoy's program, the Neglected and Delinquent Tutorial Project operated by the State University College at Brockport, provides inmates between 16-21 the opportunity to upgrade their math and reading skills. Most are working to pass their high school equivalency exams, and Dorothy pointed out that when the most recent GED exam was given to 12 inmates, nine took it successfully.

Her program can never be very structured, but McEvoy tries to meet with up to five inmates three times a week for about one hour each. With new students, she usually uses a pre-GED screening test to determine where to start.

Although she believes that the confidence her students can gain from conquering words or numbers is important, having someone to listen to them is equally necessary in her view.

"I think God uses me to reach them somehow," she said, quoting a former teacher as saying "attitudes are caught, not taught." By treating her students as worthwhile human beings, she believes she can transmit the idea to them.

Although the odds seem rather long at times that what she teaches will actually make a difference in her students' lives, McEvoy actually experiences less frustration teaching in jail than she recalls from her years in the classroom. She particularly enjoys working one-on-one with her students.

"If people could just see that there's a need not just to punish them, but to bring them up," she said, perhaps the outlook for their futures would be more positive.

Even though she's only worked as a tutor since September, McEvoy has already observed a tremendous need for some kind of support after her students are released. When their time is almost up, she recalls, so many say "I'm never coming back to this place" and agree when she reminds them to stay away from the people and the places that brought them there in the first place.

Nevertheless, they often come back. While realizing that every story can't be a success, she's unwilling to write anyone off. "There ought to be a rallying point somewhere, somehow," she said.



One of McEvoy's students, who dropped out of high school at age 17, now dreams of college someday thanks in part to her encouragement.



More than just a teacher, Dorothy McEvoy has become a friend to some of her students. Here she is thanked by a grateful scholar in the tiny classroom she shares with "Twig" Hickam, who tutors older inmates, at the Monroe County Jail.

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