

News

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LVSA Empowers Prison Literacy

Literacy Volunteers Serving Adults (LVSA), extended its mission inside prison walls in January, training a select group of inmates at Howard R. Young Correctional Center as reading tutors for their fellow inmates.

In a three-day visit January 5-7, LVSA staff members worked with ten inmate volunteers and six educational staff members so they could help other prisoners who have significant reading deficits. The program was the brainchild of Warden Philip Morgan, who decided to transform the facility's Q-Pod into a "boarding school." The LVSA tutor training program at Howard R. Young is meant to address the needs of the lowest level learners.

"We delivered an intensive version of our tutor training designed around their needs," said Cindy Shermeyer, LVSA Executive Director. "Considering that the average reading level for an incarcerated individual is below the 5th grade, we were honored to be asked to collaborate and share our experience and expertise to support the boarding school program," Shermeyer added.

Howard R. Young Correctional Facility, otherwise known as Gander Hill Prison, processes approximately 60 percent of all detainees in the Delaware correctional system, and is already home to special programs such as the "New Visions" community-based treatment and prevention program for the relapse prone offender and the nationally recognized KEY substance abuse treatment program.

Illiteracy is a significant and widespread problem in the penal system, where 75 percent of detainees are high school dropouts. Studies show that an effective prison education system can more than halve rates of recidivism in released detainees.

Feedback from prison educational staff on the program so far has been positive, and LVSA returned to Howard R. Young on March 1st for a follow up visit to assess the success and needs of the program.

Literacy Volunteers Serving Adults (LVSA), an independent, nonprofit organization, is an accredited affiliate of ProLiteracy Worldwide. LVSA trains volunteer tutors to work with some of the most vulnerable residents of the community, those adults who are nonreaders or have a literacy level below the fifth grade as well as English language learners with limited education and/or lower oral proficiency. Headquartered in the Wilmington Library for more than 25 years, LVSA serves learners throughout Northern Delaware. The organization is dedicated to helping adults improve their literacy skills and thereby reach their potential to become confident, self sufficient and productive employees and community members.

For more information, call 302-658-5624, or visit www.litvolunteers.org.

