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## Learning to read and write

# Literacy Guild helping local residents

By JANET DUVAL  
Special to The Independent/Free Press

The last time he was laid off from work, Steve decided it was time to go back to school. A Grade 12 dropout, he was getting strange looks from employers who realized he couldn't read and write well enough on the job.

That's when he found out about the North Halton Literacy Guild, and that's when Janice Smith came into his life.

Janice is one of 50 volunteers who sit down regularly with a client partner for a session of reading, writing, listening, and comprehension. Sometimes they work at the computer, using a program designed especially for the Guild.

"Steve is easy to get along with, and he's very motivated" says Janice. They've been working together for almost seven months.

"We work on problems right away" Janice explains. "If he makes a mistake in pronunciation or using plurals, we nail it down right then."

A jewelry designer by day, Janice never thought of teaching as a career. But she started reading about the job situation in Canada, that jobs of the future would require more and more literary skills. "It hit me: perhaps I could help." With her children grown and gone, there was space in her life to volunteer.

Steve, meanwhile, was going through some rough times, never keeping a job more than a few months. His school life had been

rocky too, as he was shuffled from one school to another. When he started a new school at age ten, the principal sent him back to Grade One. In high school, he didn't always get along with the teachers.

"I used to just take my homework and throw it in the locker" he says.

Now, however, he's happy to complete homework assignments for his tutor, and to come to weekly sessions with her, two hours at a time. He's reading books again at home; right now it's the Hardy Boys series. "My Dad thinks it's great" he says, beaming. "He's going to school this fall to study

Math, which was always my favourite subject. He comes to me for help with that!"

What's next? Steve wants to finish high school, and then he'd like to be a truck driver. A mechanically minded person, he strips and rebuilds old cars for endurance racing, but it's the open road that lures him.

Since it's beginning in 1986, the Literacy Guild has helped close to 300 people like Steve in North Halton.

Tutors received comprehensive training from training coordinator Eileen Evans, and are carefully matched with clients by coordinator Dymna Dewar.

Students and tutors together work out when and where they'll meet, and what they want to achieve. Confidentiality is always assured, and the service is free.

Some of the Guild's clients are immigrants with poor English, says office coordinator Marilyn Hughes. Others are Canadians who had almost no schooling at all. Some can't even read street signs, or do their banking. Statistics suggest that as many as one in five Canadians can't read.

Janice is pleased with the progress Steve has been making. "That's the big reward for me. He's here because he wants to be. Maybe in future this will keep him off the unemployment line too."

If you know someone who needs help with reading, please call the Literacy Guild at 873-2200.



Janice Smith and Steve (not really his name) study an assignment

# TAKE A BOW

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