Tutoring at Maleng Regional Justice Center (MRJC) - FAQ

1. What kind of tutoring will I be doing at MRJC?

- At MRJC, we offer the opportunity to work one-to-one with GED, ESOL (English to speakers of other languages) and ABE (Adult Basic Education) students. The first priority is GED preparation, but there are also opportunities to work with students in job readiness, English practice, pre-HSE (High School Equivalency) level reading comprehension, and more. Keep in mind that while we do try to align the students’ tutoring needs with the skills of our tutors to as great a degree as possible, we prioritize students that are taking the GED, and have the greatest need for tutors that are comfortable tutoring math at the high school equivalency level (or are willing to refresh their skills).

2. What times are available for tutoring?

- Because the tutoring program for MRJC is new as of 2019, we are working to create a program with the least amount of barriers to student access as possible, which means that tutoring will take place in the main Multi-Purpose Room (where educational classes and many programs take place). We believe this will provide the most seamless educational experience for students, but because a number of existing programs utilize this space, use of the Multi-Purpose room is extremely limited. We are currently enlisting tutors that are available on either Thursdays (afternoon or evening) or Saturdays (late morning and early afternoon).

3. How do I know I will be safe in the jail setting?

- Firstly, all tutors participate in a Safety & Security training, which will help them understand the jail setting, as well as how to ensure their own safety. There are more than 100 Correctional Officers (COs) that serve at the MRJC, whose primary purpose is to ensure the safety and security of everyone in the jail.
- Secondly, students are heavily vetted, and all students working with tutors are in class full time. Their teacher has chosen them because they have demonstrated that they are motivated and respectful, and the tutor coordinator has met with them to clarify behavior expectations, and also endorses the candidate. They understand this is a privilege, and we have yet to have an incident in which a tutor was in danger.

4. What is the time commitment for tutoring at MRJC?

- Tutors are expected to commit to at least 12 months of tutoring 1.5-2 hours (1 time) per week. The total time commitment will be more like 2.5 hours as you will need to allow thirty minutes (at least initially) to enter the facility and access/prepare appropriate resources, and to give yourself time to exit as well. We recommend that you do not plan anything immediately before
or after tutoring because unexpected delays (e.g., codes) can occur that might slow down the process.

5. **What is the training expectation?**

- Because of the nature of volunteering in a correctional facility, the training requirement is heavier for those volunteers who wish to tutor at MRJC. There are two mandatory MRJC trainings
  - Safety & Security Training - *Online*, a half hour training that explains the jail setting and what it is like volunteering in a jail.
  - Tutor Training - *In-Person*. This training focuses on what it is like to be a tutor at MRJC, including expectations, regulations, logistics, voices from experienced tutors, and an opportunity to experience the GED.

*Please keep in mind there is a training requirement of 10 hours in the first year of volunteering with Literacy Source.* These hours can be accumulated via a combination of the above MRJC trainings, and in-person/online trainings offered by Literacy Source. These trainings are designed to give you more tools in your tool belt in order to be an effective tutor.

**Online Trainings**

For tutoring at the jail, the following trainings are relevant (each training takes between 1-2.5 hours and these hours go towards your training requirement):

  1. [Orientation to GED 2014 for ABE Teachers](#)
  2. [An Overview of the Writing Process](#)
  3. [A Look at the Most-Missed Items on the GED® Mathematical Reasoning Test](#)

**In-Person Trainings**

Please go to Literacy Source’s [events page](#) to find what upcoming trainings we have available for tutors, such as Lesson Planning & Best Practices and Understanding Adult Learners. If you are not sure whether the in-person trainings would be relevant for your role, contact Liz.

6. **How long does the process take to get started tutoring at the jail?**

- From the time that you express your interest to Liz (assuming there is no waiting list) The steps are as follows:
  - Phone Screen (15-30 min): Facility/role descriptions, clarification of expectations, initial questions *Expected wait time for scheduling: 2-7 days*
  - In-person interview (1 hour): Includes, if appropriate, completing Literacy Source and MRJC paperwork (please remember to bring an ID and have contact details for two references). *Expected wait time for scheduling: 5-14 days.*
  - MRJC paperwork clearance process. *Expected wait time 2-10 weeks.* (When you are approved, Mary Ann Morbley (DAJD Community Volunteer Program Coordinator) will
contact you with next steps, including watching an orientation video and scheduling photo appointment.)

- A tutor training (2 hours) will be scheduled, which will include GED practice/strategies, tutoring tips and practice scenarios, reviewing the tutor handbook and Code of Conduct, and ‘Voices from Tutors’ \textit{Expected wait time 1-3 weeks}
- At the conclusion of the tutor training, Liz will schedule your orientation and first tutoring session at a time that is convenient for both of you. \textit{Expected wait time: 1-2 weeks.}
- \textbf{Total expected wait time} for starting with a student from initial inquiry: \textit{3-4 months} (if there is no waiting list).

7. **Can I tutor at the jail if I have a criminal record?**

- While you must pass a criminal background check and undergo a thorough application process to enter the jail, there is a possibility that you may still be able to tutor if you have a criminal record. Please contact the tutor coordinator to discuss further.

8. **What is the main difference between the jail and other educational settings?**

- The priority of the criminal justice system is \textit{not} education, it is safety & security. Sometimes this is hard for certain volunteers to understand if they are accustomed to traditional educational environments. In order to succeed you will need to embrace this. Correctional Officers may, on occasion, behave in a way that seems rude or confusing to you, but please be assured their actions are an effort to ensure the safety of those who enter the jail.

9. **I need special accommodations. Can I still tutor at the jail?**

- While MRJC would like to accommodate everyone who would like to help in the community, there are unfortunately very strict parameters for who can enter the jail, and what sort of items they can bring in with them. If you would need to bring any unauthorized items (e.g. an insulin pump, food, a walking cane) within the secure perimeter during your tutoring session, you would not be able to tutor at the jail. We understand that these items are only needed to ensure either your health and safety, or your ability to effectively tutor. However, keep in mind that this is a jail setting, for which there are very strict parameters that our educational system must work within. We would never ask you to put your health or safety at risk, and would therefore recommend that you consider another volunteering option with Literacy Source.

11. **What is the parking situation at MRJC?**

- One of the perks of tutoring at MJRC rather than KCCF is the ease of transportation \textit{if you have your own car} or if you live in the Kent area (where MRJC is located). Kent is roughly thirty minutes from Seattle if there is no traffic, and there is a free parking garage on site. You enter the facility directly from the parking garage so access is fairly straightforward.
12. **Is there anything important I should know before volunteering at the jail?**

- The most important character traits for succeeding in a correctional facility environment are **patience** and **flexibility**. Because the system is not set-up to prioritize education or cater to civilians, there are a number of logistical challenges: inmates may have court, attorney visits, rotating visitation hours, or medical emergencies, and there are often differing expectations amongst various Correctional Officers. As well, communication is more difficult in a jail setting so there may come a time when you have come down to the jail to tutor and your student is either no longer there or not available. I am only part time (20 hrs/week, divided between King County Correctional Facility and Maleng Regional Justice Center) at the jail as well, so immediate response time cannot always be guaranteed outside of office hours. If the unpredictability of the system seems like too great a challenge for you, we’d be happy to discuss other volunteering opportunities with Literacy Source around the Seattle community.

13. **What are the benefits of volunteering at the jail?**

- Of all the volunteers I’ve coordinated, I’d say those at the jail have had the most meaningful experiences. Particularly if you are working with students in the GED class, there are clear goals and - sometimes immediate - rewards. Students usually find out on the day that they are taking a GED test what their scores are, and if the pass, those are jubilant moments indeed! It is a powerful experience to be part of a graduation ceremony for an incarcerated student, and it is rewarding to know that you are contributing to the educational advancement of members of one of society’s most marginalized (and often forgotten) communities.

Although it presents its challenges, tutoring at the jail is unlike any other volunteering experience in that you are truly reaching and serving a thoroughly disenfranchised and underserved population. It is not often that civilians are offered an opportunity to enter into correctional facilities, please take the responsibility with care and ensure that you are always putting the educational needs of the students first.

14. **Okay, I’m definitely still interested, what’s next?**

- Once your interest is conveyed to me (Liz, the MRJC tutor coordinator), I will contact you and let you know if there are current openings, or whether you will be added to the waiting list. After that, there will be a short phone screen, followed by an in-person interview which will include completing the clearance paperwork for Literacy Source and MRJC.