Tutoring at King County Correctional Facility (KCCF) - FAQ

What kind of tutoring will I be doing at KCCF?

At KCCF, 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).

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 350 Correctional Officers (COs) 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 teachers have chosen them because they are motivated and respectful. They understand this is a privilege, and we have yet to have an incident in which a tutor was in danger.

What is the time commitment for tutoring at KCCF?

Tutors are expected to commit to at least 12 months of tutoring 2-4 hours (1-2 sessions) per week. The schedule is flexible: tutoring hours run from 10am-9pm. Tutors should allow themselves two hours for each meeting, as there are sometimes delays in the jail (e.g. medical codes, shift changes, elevators down, etc).

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):

i. Orientation to GED 2014 for ABE Teachers
ii. An Overview of the Writing Process
iii. 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 Katie.

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

We often have a long waiting list for tutoring at the jail, which at times can be as much as 9-12 months. Once you are contacted by Katie that there is a tutor opening, the process will on average take 2-3 months. The steps are as follows:

- Phone Screen (15-30 min): Facility/role descriptions, clarification of expectations, initial questions.
- In-person interview (1 hour): Includes, if appropriate, completing Literacy Source and KCCF paperwork (please remember to bring an ID and have contact details for two references).
- Once the KCCF paperwork is turned in, it can take anywhere between 2-10 weeks for the applications to clear. When you are approved, Karen Pohio (DAJD programs manager) will contact you with next steps, including watching an orientation video and scheduling photo appointment. Please cc Katie on your response to this email.
- A tutor training (2 hours) will be scheduled, which will include GED practice/strategy, tutoring tips and practice scenarios, reviewing the tutor handbook and Code of Conduct, and ‘Voices from Tutors’.
- At the conclusion of the tutor training, Katie will schedule your orientation and first tutoring session at a time that is convenient for both of you.

**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.

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

The priority of the criminal justice system is *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.

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

While King County 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) up to the floors 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.

**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. Katie is only part time (12 hrs/week) at the jail, 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.
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.

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

Once your interest is conveyed to Katie, the KCCF tutor coordinator, she 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 KCCF.